

# PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN SPORT ORGANISATIONS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

June, 2014





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# 1. Background

Grassroots sport today engages 40 % of all Europeans in physical activity on a regular basis. However, there is a considerable gap between European countries with regard to the degree of involvement of citizens in recreational sport and physical activity.

The European Union has the potential to increase the number of citizens who are regularly active in sport and physical activity by another 100 million and we believe that this should be a common European vision.

The benefits of striving to achieve such a vision are apparent. It will increase quality of life and decrease the number of illnesses and deaths (WHO, 2006), as physical inactivity alone causes 10% of deaths in Europe. Further, an increase in citizens' physical activity levels will expand the economy related to the sport sector by approximately €50 billion in household spending alone (Amnyos & Eurostrategies, 2010).

Local authorities and sport organisations are focal points to activate citizens throughout Europe and provide them with incentives to move. Not only are local

authorities the second largest source of the estimated total budget of the sport system (€26.0bn), they are also key enablers when developing new opportunities and facilitating environments for physical activity.

ACTIVE Network is the first project the European Union has supported focusing on cross-sector collaboration between local authorities and sport organisations. The EU's backing of the project is a strong recognition of how valuable these relationships are in facilitating and promoting sport for all initiatives.

Commencing in 2013, the project has brought together 15 local authorities-sport organisation partnerships from 13 countries to examine how partnerships across the two sectors can function effectively. Over the course of the project partners have compiled this knowledge, gathered best practice examples and implemented learning and exchange events throughout Europe.

Find more about the ACTIVE Network project here <http://www.active-network.eu/> and at the end of this document.



## 2. Characteristics of good partnerships

A partnership is an agreement to do something together that will benefit all involved, bringing results that could not be achieved by a single partner operating alone and reducing duplication of efforts. A successful partnership enhances the impact and effectiveness of action through combined and more efficient use of resources; promotes innovation; and is distinguished by a strong commitment from each partner. To achieve sustained success it is essential that basic local parameters are created and agreed upon; equally essential factors are political will, resourcing and the appropriation of funds.

**The partnership will be effective if the partners share a strategic vision, define the targets and are all equal members of an organisational structure.** The partnership should be able to bring together different actors in collaborative action as well as in collaborative efforts to bring about change.

One key motive for implementing partnerships between sport organisations and local authorities is the belief that working together is more effective than working

in isolation. Partnerships operate under different local conditions, depending on the nature of the problems they are addressing, the institutional environment, political factors, experiences and culture. And these conditions can be so different across all European countries. Given that the specific requirements for engaging in partnerships always depend on these varying conditions, it can be said that **there is no one model for a successful partnership.**

Whatever the reason for setting up a partnership, there are still some key factors to bear in mind. First, it is important to encourage all relevant actors to join in the partnership. So who is a relevant actor? One could say any sport organisation and local authority can work together if they are part of the same problem to be addressed or part of the solution. This is, of course, easier said than done. In many cases, groups with similar interests will easily agree on common targets, but will be reluctant to trust each other if they have not worked with each other before. The partners may wonder why they should bother working together, but they often realise that they need each other and therefore need to establish this trust if they want to solve the problems they are trying to address.



### 3) Partnerships between sport organisations and local authorities in light of the four Good Governance principles and Active Network criteria

One essential step in building a partnership is to ensure that everyone involved knows what the partnership is about, who is doing what, what the processes are and which outcomes are expected.

This step relies on the four good governance principles: democracy, transparency, accountability and inclusiveness.

**Democracy** in local authorities and sport organisations involves facilitating open and frequent access for citizens to influence the political and strategic direction and leadership of their local communities. It entails both the equal right of citizens to run and vote for political leadership functions, as well as the possibility to debate and influence the key decisions affecting the local community.

**Transparency** in local authorities and sport organisations ensures that members, as well as stakeholders, know how the local community is operating and have a vehicle to address concerns. It includes local authorities and sport organisations keeping accounts and ensuring that policies and procedures are published.

**Accountability** in local authorities and sport organisations means defining clear responsibilities for the different parts of the community, including professional staff and volunteers/voluntary committees.

**Inclusiveness** in the representation of interested stakeholders means that local authorities and sport organisations should enable a broad range of groups to be involved in decision making processes. This includes the involvement of underrepresented groups in deci-

sions, the access of these groups to activities and the inclusion of external stakeholders in decision-making processes.

This “Principles and recommendations for local partnerships between sport organisations and local authorities” was written by practitioners for practitioners, and is based on personal experience and knowledge of ACTIVE Network partners and based on the **ACTIVE Network criteria for partnerships. The criteria are outlined below.**

#### a. Translation of the local policy into successful implementation.

Partnerships require coherent policies or strategies that lay down clear objectives and principles, identify projects/activities/events, and set realistic targets and the means to achieve them.

#### b. Involvement of people (citizens as well as other stakeholders) who can play a critical role in the partnership.

Partnerships should put people first by making their activities transparent and being accountable for them, as well as taking active steps to improve people’s lives, especially those in socially and economically disadvantaged communities. Local authorities and sport organisations can build their capacities to serve their com:

munities better and more openly by taking a combined approach that includes networking and training for professionals and volunteers.

**c. Defining the process: i.e. how things should be done, not just what should be done.**

Strong partnerships between local authorities and sport organisations provide direction, leadership and insight and avoid inappropriate involvement in other operational matters. Risk management principles are incorporated into everyday practice to minimise risk, enhance decision-making, and create more productive and resilient partnerships.



## 4. Recommendations for partnerships between sport organisations and local authorities

### R1 A partnership should have clear and autonomous structure with stability as well as flexibility.

- The partnership should enjoy **political and social commitments**.
  - A strong sense of **ownership** must be in place.
  - Agreements must be based on **clear responsibilities**, joint rights and obligations, and are reached by consensus between the local authority and sport organisation.
  - The partnership needs to take an **inclusive approach** (relevant actors are involved in planning and implementation).
  - Strong commitment from each of the partners should be reflected by both partners being equally present and, where possible, represented by experienced persons who have influence within their organisation.
  - Adequate **financial, human and other resources** must be available for implementation.
- A “**learning culture**” must be communicated and fostered by allowing new ideas to come forward in an open exchange of experiences.
  - Resources, responsibilities and tasks may differ, but the added value of the partnership to each partner should be recognised.
  - The **involvement of other relevant partners** and subjects on the local or regional level is important (other public organisations/institutions, NGOs, non-formal communities, the business sector, individual citizens and voluntary and community sector agencies as well as effective support from national and regional government).

Partnerships require coherent policies that lay down clear objectives and principles, identify projects/activities/ events, set realistic targets and the means of achieving them.

**R2: The partners need a shared commitment to a long-term strategy to work effectively. The strategy must include a vision of the outcome, an action plan identifying short-term priorities, and a coordinated working programme including activities, measures and evaluation of continuous improvement.**

- The **strategy** is based on a comprehensive analysis of challenges and problems, as well as on an assessment of local needs.
- Common **objectives** must be determined.

- **Targets** must be set and clearly defined.
- The strategy, objectives, targets and activities must be reviewed and revised according to agreed standards at regular intervals, taking into account partners' experiences as well as changes in context.
- Programme targets must be compatible with relevant strategic documents (i.e. local or national programmes and guidelines, regional models).
- The various measures and projects need to be planned and correspond to the strategy and to local and regional needs.

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**R3: The partnership must be built on a foundation of the accountability and transparency.**

- It is highly necessary to agree on **formal procedures** that lay down rules of procedure for everyday actions, meetings, working groups, professional staff, volunteers and relationship.
- It is recommended to write down the basic tasks and requirements in a formal document that defines and describes the **“who, what and when”** of the staff involved in the partnership.
- It is important to effectively manage staff and to establish **clear communication channels** among them all.
- It is important to understand cultural differences between the partners and acknowledge differences between the **professional staff and volunteers**.

- Mutual confidence and respect among the partners and other persons involved in the partnership and a high level of information exchange is needed.
- It is important that frequent personnel changes in local authorities (due to political changes) will not influence the partnership between the local authority and sport organisation.

**Partnerships between local authorities and sport organisations involve people (citizens as well as other stakeholders) and allow them to play a critical role in the development and promotion of sport and physical activity.**

**R4: Local authorities and sport organisations should build their capacities through a combined approach that includes networking, building skills and training for professionals and volunteers.**

- One of the driving forces in improving the **efficiency and effectiveness** of partnerships is the development of innovative management and evaluation tools.
- Activities to improve **planning and cooperation** within the partnership must be developed.
- **Methodologies and working tools**, such as the Management System and Quality Management process, are needed for understanding among partners and for the development process of both partners.

**R5: The clear partnership provides direction and leadership without necessary involvement in operational matters.**

- The partnership should be built on appropriate **structures** already existing in the area. The procedure must include several phases: preparation, drawing up a contract (where necessary), establishing a work programme, implementing the work programme, and carrying out monitoring and evaluation on an ongoing basis.
- A well-established information and **communication strategy** should be developed, which should be linked to the partnership's overall strategic plan – and regular action plans deriving from that strategy should be formulated. Sufficient resources – both staff time and financial resources – need to be dedicated to communications.
- Resources and energy should be devoted to **monitoring and evaluation**, on the basis of realistic but demanding performance indicators and targets which are clearly defined.

- **Participation** of partners in European/national or other networks is needed for further development.
- Developing **training programmes**, methodologies and working tools for the implementation of common projects is highly recommended.
- The experience and best practices of partnerships from other communities/regions/countries are highly valued and are needed for quality development. **Transferring good examples** from other communities should also be considered.
- Create a **'safe' learning environment** which supports partners in celebrating and building upon their successes as well as identifying reasons for any lack of progress.

- **Uncomplicated administration** and accountancy methods are recommended.
- **Risk management** principles are set into everyday practice to minimise risk, enhance decision-making, and create a more productive and resilient partnership.
- To make a **partnership inclusive** it is important that all voices within it are heard. This both requires and guarantees a balance of influence, mutual respect and care in the organisation. Good communication will facilitate meetings, decisions and interaction between partners. One should not forget that the partners have to play a two-way communication role, acting as the connection points between the organisations they represent and the partnership itself.

**One essential step in building a partnership is to ensure that everyone involved knows what the partnership is about, who is doing what, what the processes are and which outcomes are expected.**



## 5. Final words

Too few Europeans enjoy the benefits of a physically active lifestyle. Too many are either inactive or not sufficiently active. As a result, many European citizens and European societies are paying the price for health problems associated with physical inactivity, including lower life quality, shorter life expectancy and the economic impact of expensive healthcare bills.

The most valuable partnership for participation in sport and physical activity in Europe is the partnership between local authorities and sport organisations. This is the partnership which can involve citizens in their communities and deliver sport and physical activity initiatives close to where they live.

This partnership operates in different cultural, political and economic contexts – and naturally with different outcomes and impacts. (The latest Eurobarometer underlines this very clearly [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-14-207\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-207_en.htm) ).

But the fact that partnerships between local authorities and sport organisations have, in quite a few countries, shown significant capability to make citizens enjoy and societies benefit from physical activity is a good reason to stress the importance of these partnership and

stimulate their development across Europe. Local authorities and sport organisations are the key players in the game of making Europeans more physically active.

As the ACTIVE Network project has shown, a clear vision is one of the essential ingredients of a partnership and is what drives it further. A clear understanding of the partnerships' vision leads to greater stakeholder support and accomplishment. Generally speaking, a vision can be defined as a common understanding of partnership development in a long-term perspective. Every partnership needs its own vision based on values, hopes and dreams, as this will motivate the partners, create a dynamic network and link a variety of interests in a joint effort towards reaching a common goal.

Partnerships vary throughout the Europe and their successes and barriers differ significantly, too. Success factors that work for one partnership may not help in other cases. They will vary according to their surroundings, their conditions and their tasks. But their overall goal is a common one. And as such, all community-based partnerships should contribute positively to improving local governance and democratic processes and build effective vertical and horizontal communication channels within and between different sectors to help **make Europeans more physically active.**



# 6. About the ACTIVE Network project

## Project leader

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In 2013, the ACTIVE Network project identified 15 examples of effective partnerships between local authorities and sport organisations and established a European network for similar types of partnerships to flourish. The partnerships included in the project are examples of GOs and NGOs who have come together to focus on their respective competencies and deliver services to citizens of critical value. In this case, the services they delivered were specifically targeted towards improving sport and physical activity initiatives in their communities.

While partnerships between local authorities and sport organisations were in focus in this project, the project does not in any way ignore the importance of (further)

cross-sector collaboration. The good practices identified and documented in the project in fact describe the potential for other sectors' and actors' involvement. The project's focus on partnerships between local authorities and sport organisations allowed for a more in-depth perspective of the project and network, and it is innovative in character because such a dual-sector network in the field of sport is otherwise unseen today.

The sport organisations in the project had a specific role to exploit well-functioning partnerships between themselves and different local authorities and aim to spread the good practices to other localities in their particular country.

## ACTIVE Network Project outcomes:

1. Increase the knowledge base for effective promotion of citizens' participation in sport via partnerships between local authorities and sport organizations; by
  - collecting and valorising good practices in partnerships between sport organisations and local authorities.
  - identifying and describing in detail 10 excellent practices with extraordinary results/potential results and high transferability.
  - developing principles and recommendations for local partnerships between sport organisations and local authorities.

2. Build capacities in project partner organisations to deploy more effective partnerships between local authorities and sport organisations; by

- designing and implementing learning and exchange opportunities for such effective partnerships to develop. These opportunities were based on the participation of “learning pairs” of local sport organisations and local authorities from the same community that developed their partnerships during the project period.

3. Raise awareness and facilitate the establishment of a network on the effective promotion of citizens' participation in via partnerships between local authorities and sport organisations; by

- initiating a friendly competition between good practice partnerships, demonstrating high quality of the partnership and organising events to celebrate the good examples and future development of partnerships.
- testing and providing a network concept for project partners and beyond.
- advocating towards national and EU governmental institutions on the key role of sport organisations and local authorities in the promotion of sport and physical activity.

**PROJECT FACTS:**

**PROJECT PERIOD:**

January 2013 – June 2014

**CO-FUNDED:**

European Commission DG for Education and Culture under the 2012 Preparatory Action in the Field of Sport

**AGREEMENT NO.:**

EAC-2012-0561

**TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET:**

344.407,00 euro, Support from EC:  
200.000,00 euro



# 7. ACTIVE Network project partners

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# 7. ACTIVE Network project partners

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*The ACTIVE Network project received support from the European Commission, Education and Culture DG, under the "2012 Preparatory Action in the Field of Sport".*

*Topic: Awareness-raising about effective ways of promoting sport at municipal level*

