

Physical active-friendly environment



photo: Jan Schartman

A neighbourhood environment should invite her inhabitants to be regularly physically active. That's exactly what the Netherlands Institute for Sport and Physical Activity (NISB) is actively working on. In studies of the health impacts of neighbourhood environments, the association between the built environment and physical activity is of central importance. Together with a number of pilot municipalities, NISB is going to set to work on creating physical active-friendly public spaces. NISB is responsible for developing and disseminating more information on this subject.

Many neighbourhoods are faced with issues relating to liveability, safety and, to an increasing extent, the health of its residents. Studies have shown that the spatial environment can help get people to exercise. The layout of a neighbourhood should 'seduce' residents to exercise, not only to benefit health, but also to increase the liveability of neighbourhoods.

When layout is also linked to the activities on offer, residents become more connected to their neighbourhood. This is what the project Physical active -friendly environment is all about. NISB started this project with a subsidy from the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports. Each participating municipality will set to work on activities in the neighbourhood in its own way. For many municipalities, this is the first time that spatial planning, sports and health care converge in plans for (re)developing a neighbourhood.

Project Physical active (PA) -friendly Environment

Together with the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, NISB has formulated the ambition to gather more information on the Project PA-friendly Environment (abbreviated to BVO in Dutch) so as to gain more insight into:

- the physical and social measures that could be taken to create an exercise-friendly environment;
- the process required to create an PA-friendly environment;
- the success and failure factors in the policy and implementation processes;
- the effects of the measures taken; does a BVO result in more sports and exercise?

For years, NISB has been dedicated to health, participation in society and the liveability of communities by way of sports and exercise.

A lot has already been written in the literature and various government policy documents about what an PA-friendly environment could be and what it should look like. In short, it is an environment:

- which invites and challenges people to be physical active (it's functional and can be used for sports and recreation);
- where there are enough opportunities/facilities/places for all target groups;
- which is flexible so that the layout can change based on changes in the target group and needs;
- which is nearby, safe (from both a traffic and social point of view), clean and easily accessible;
- which is well managed and which has activities on offer (aimed at meeting people and exercising).

These elements clearly reflect the desired link between 'physical' (public space, accommodation, green areas, traffic, etc.) and 'social' (activities, management, encouragement, etc.).

Results

NISB will use the information acquired in the BVO project for:

- a report which outlines eight practical BVO examples (the pilot municipalities) with special attention being given to success factors and transferable effective principles;
- a project database of good BVO practices;
- a BVO neighbourhood scan to check if a neighbourhood has an PA-friendly layout coupled with an initiative for an action plan;
- a website with all of the available information on BVO which the target group can access.

Pilot municipalities

In consultation with the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, Almere, Amsterdam, Bergen op Zoom, Deventer, Heerhugowaard, Rosmalen, Rotterdam and Zoetermeer have all been chosen as pilot municipalities. The projects being carried out in the chosen pilot municipalities vary from remodelling a park and opening it up to the public to building playgrounds, and from redeveloping green facilities to creating a walking and cycling network. One of the key agreements between the pilot municipalities is that, in addition to the physical measures, social measures will also be addressed. For example, organising activities in the neighbourhood or at schools and after-school child care, providing club support, arranging fitness activities for senior citizens, etc. For the most part, these activities will fall under the supervision of the municipality in collaboration with private and social organisations, such as housing corporations.

More information

Email chienne.bolt@nisb.nl or visit our website, www.nisb.nl/buurt, for inspiring examples, tips and the most recent information.

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