

Thessaloniki – BlueHealth Stakeholder Workshop September 19th, 2019

BlueHealth experts from RIVM and Aristotle University hosted a workshop in Thessaloniki (Greece) Research Dissemination Center (KEDEA) on September 19th, 2019. About 23 experts participated, providing a great diversity of expertise ranging from the environmental protection and nature conservation, water management, planning and municipality development, public health, social affairs, and community engagement. The objective of the workshop was to identify values and ambitions for the city of Thessaloniki regarding its urban blue spaces and related interventions, identify the most relevant global economic, societal, and environmental trends, and investigate the possible impacts on a local scale.

Key values and trends

The workshop provided an overview of the BlueHealth project, sharing case study research that is taking place at various European cities on the relationship between spatial interventions related to blue spaces and healthy behaviour. Especially the Thessaloniki case study was highlighted. Then an introduction to the development of local scenarios was given. The BlueHealth project aims to address the questions how future trends may affect urban blue infrastructures and what policy interventions on urban blue infrastructure can be beneficial to public health and well-being? To this end, workshops are organised with local stakeholders to identify local values regarding BlueHealth, discuss the local relevancy of often global trends, their impacts and possible interventions.

Thereafter, participants were asked to express their key values regarding BlueHealth for the future and then to rate certain future trends and to assess how relevant they were to Thessaloniki city. Participants scored them based on local relevancy and uncertainty.

Key values identified were:

1. 'Sustainable urban design',
2. 'Health for all',
3. 'Education',
4. 'Accessibility and equality'.

The trends ranked as most relevant for Thessaloniki and BlueHealth included (score between brackets):

1. Climate change (13),
2. Migration (9),
3. Technology towards more healthy urban living (9),
4. More recreational use of blue spaces (7),
5. More healthy urban living in EU policies and strategies (7),
6. Changes in labour conditions (6).

The trends ranked as most uncertain for Thessaloniki and BlueHealth included:

1. Digitalisation of society (11),
2. Increasing life expectancy (9),
3. Higher risks of flooding (8),
4. Increased digital connectivity (6),
5. Increasing individualisation (5).

Discussion on future impacts of trends

The second part of the workshop focused on the discussion how these trends may have impact at the Thessaloniki city level from a particular key value. The group was split into two groups and each group focused on a key value to discuss. Group one explored 'Sustainable urban design' as the key value. The underlying trends selected as most relevant for this value were 'Climate change' and 'More recreational use of blue spaces'. Group two explored: 'Health for all (equality)' as the key values. The trends selected as most relevant, were 'Climate change' and 'Technology towards more healthy urban living'.

This process led to the identification of various building blocks and factors to take into consideration when designing BlueHealth interventions. For instances elements to consider regarding 'Climate change' and 'More recreational use of blue spaces' are related to the city's character and needs like cultural and lifestyle aspects. Participants mentioned the importance of a mentality change among citizens and the need to invest in community building, communication and crisis management. More volunteers could be involved to realise this change (the Facebook group with volunteers to keep the waterfront clean was mentioned as an example). The suggestion was made to connect the findings from the BlueHealth project to other projects, share data, increase impact. For the municipality it is difficult to identify what is there already, but also for scientists this connection could lead to a further understanding of the relationship between water and health.

Reflection and evaluation pacts

The workshop ended with a reflection and short evaluation. Inclusion of the whole community of Thessaloniki as vulnerable groups are needed. Consider the impact with others who use the waterfront (if then, data mining, unification). Model results need to be transformed into understandable information for citizens.

Participants indicated that it was an interesting workshop, with a lot of information. Participants wanted to stay connected to the project.

It seems that the most frequently mentioned uncertainties as digitalisation of society and increased digital connectivity the biggest wishes are of the city of Thessaloniki. People mentioned: 'Model results need to be transformed into understandable information for citizens', 'Open information is needed', Inform people like indication at the bus stops about real feeling temperature', 'Consider the impact with others who use the waterfront (if then, data mining, unification)'.

The results of the discussions have been incorporated in the introduction presentation, sheets on prioritization of trends and impact of trends.

Draft versions of this meeting report will be circulated with the participants and other interested partners in Thessaloniki for comments and suggestions. The draft scenarios will be circulated as well for feedback.