

**European Commission**

**Health and Consumer Protection DG**

**Unit C4 – Health Determinants**

**L-2920 Luxembourg**

**via email: SANCO-C4-NUTRITIONGREENPAPER@cec.eu.int**

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Ref.: ISB

**Re: Consultation exercise regarding the EU Commission's Green Paper on "Promoting healthy diets and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases"**

The Danish Outdoor Council (*Friluftsrådet*) welcomes the fact that, with this Green Paper, the EU Commission is assuming responsibility for a broad consultation process with a view to collating initiatives on joint actions to improve health in the EU.

**General remarks**

Our reason for commenting on the Green Paper is first and foremost that we are the umbrella organisation for around 90 organisations with an interest in outdoor activities, awareness-raising, nature and the environment. Since its establishment in 1942, the Council's aims have been threefold:

- to encourage outdoor activities and enhance the opportunities for taking advantage of these;
- to safeguard not only the interests of its members, but also those of the wider, non-organised section of the population;
- to advise the authorities on questions and issues affecting us and our organisations.

These observations as part of the consultation exercise do not reflect the views of all 93 organisations, but are based on experience and knowledge gained via the Council's many networks, earlier consultation exercises on similar issues, etc.

The last time the Green Paper was discussed was at a meeting of the Nordic Outdoor Network (*Nordisk Friluftsværk*)<sup>1</sup> on 10 March 2006.

There is a clear wish on the part of the Nordic outdoor organisations to point out that we are available and keen to contribute to work concerning physical activity. However, outdoor activities are not mentioned, and we feel that we are not being involved. The Outdoor Council should play a part in encouraging outdoor activities. These activities very often entail some degree of physical exertion, and they also improve a person's mental health, which may be of considerable benefit even if they do not break into a sweat or find their pulse racing.

**<sup>1</sup> Nordisk Friluftsværk:**

*This is a Nordic network of umbrella organisations in the field of outdoor activities. It consists of the Danish Outdoor Council, the Norwegian Outdoor Council (Friluftslivets Fellesorganisasjon – FRIFO), the Association of Regional Outdoor Councils (Friluftsrådernes Landsforbund – FL), the Swedish Outdoor Council (Friluftsgöskolor i Samverkan –, FRISAM) and the Outdoor Forum (FriluftForum/Ulkoiluforum). The Nordic Outdoor Network was set up in 1993.*

Mental health is improved by, among other things, the benefits gained from getting out into the open and experiencing nature. This is perhaps the most important element of Sunday walks, fishing trips and cycling. Exercise is an additional benefit. The mental energy and sense of well-being to be gained from being outdoors are in themselves reason to take physical exercise and look critically at one's lifestyle, including diet.

The Outdoor Council would therefore recommend that outdoor activities become a specific element alongside physical activity and daily exercise, and that at national level active use should be made of the competence and networking possibilities which outdoor recreation organisations can offer.

**More specific remarks:**

**Re IV 3 – Health across EU policies**

*What are the concrete contributions which Community policies, if any, should make towards the promotion of healthy diets and physical activity, and towards creating environments which make healthy choices easy choices?*

- Work can be done to tackle the multinational companies' dominance and promoting of certain foods/beverages etc. at particular locations in shops and supermarkets.
- Humour can be used to support and promote various awareness-raising campaigns, such as "6 om dagen", "Fisk – det tager kun 5 minutter" etc.

*Which kind of Community or national measures could contribute towards improving the attractiveness, availability, accessibility and affordability of fruits and vegetables?*

- Tax differentials could be used in order to exempt ecological products (national policy).
- Children and young people could be given free fruit in schools and day-care centres.
- Subsidies could be turned on their head so that, for example, subsidies for school milk are given to low-fat and natural products rather than providing a support mechanism for producers, which makes the fattiest milk the cheapest.

*In which areas related to nutrition, physical activity, the development of tools for the analysis of related disorders, and consumer behaviour is more research needed?*

- There is quite a lot of research going on already, and there are countless "philosophies" concerning nutrition, for example. It is difficult to retain an overview.
- There is a lack of research<sup>2</sup> concerning the importance of outdoor activities for physical and mental health.

#### **Re IV.4 – Public Health Action programme**

*How can the Commission's Public Health Action Programme contribute to raising the awareness of healthy diets and physical activity and to reducing the risk of chronic diseases?*

- Communication at many levels. Traditional media, including perhaps special local-level free-of-charge media backed up by advertising material from the supermarkets, exam papers in

<sup>2</sup> For further details, see FRISAM, Sweden ([www.frisam.org](http://www.frisam.org)) and the Centre for Forestry, Agriculture and Planning (Center for Skov, Landskab og Planlægning) attached to the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University (KVL) ([www.sl.kvl.dk](http://www.sl.kvl.dk)). The latter is currently looking into the effect of outdoor activities on young people with eating disorders.

schools, radio and TV programmes along the lines of "Ring til sundhedsplejerske Sigrid Riise" and "Lægens Bord". All the information imparted by these programmes can be obtained in many places, but gain greater visibility via the media and the people involved.

#### **Re V.1 – Areas for action, consumer information, advertising and marketing**

- With regard to the moral and ethic responsibility of producers, incentives should be given not to market/talk up/advertise products containing sugar on children's' programmes in schools etc. This also applies to "light" products, which on the other hand are often full of unhealthy artificial sweeteners.

#### **Re V.2 – Consumer education**

*How can consumers best be enabled to make informed choices and take effective action?*

- The EU and the national governments can try to provide clear messages and information on e.g. nutritional value, additives etc. Promotion of reliance on "sound judgment".

*In the field of nutrition and physical activity, which should be the key messages to give to consumers, how and by whom should they be delivered?*

- No short answer is possible here. All available information is probably there. Make it simple and straightforward. Distinguish between healthy and unhealthy people, and between prevention and cure. This is a task involving many players, and it is important to take a holistic view and quite literally "rope in" the alternative world. Germany is a long way ahead in this respect, with practising doctors also making use of alternative medicine, homeopathy, etc.

#### **Re V.3 – Focus in children and young people**

*What is good practice for the provision of physical activity in schools on a regular basis?*

- In Finland, the children are outside during break periods together with the teachers, and play ball, run around or otherwise play actively.
- In Denmark it is often compulsory for the youngest classes to go outside, thus adding to the attraction of reaching the 4th or 5th grade and being allowed to stay in, which enjoys higher status than being outside. There should be incentives to go outside, possibly with a "reward" such as some fruit or a wholemeal biscuit for completing the obstacle course.

- In other words, school playgrounds should also appeal to children of various ages as places to spend their time. Teachers should also get outside, both to prevent bullying/violence in the corners of playgrounds, and to recharge their batteries for the next lesson.
- Outdoor lessons should be promoted, among other things in order to encourage children to be more physically active, and because they stimulate learning and enhance the children's skills in a number of areas.<sup>3</sup>
- A study<sup>4</sup> undertaken by the University of Southern Denmark among 9-year-olds shows that those to walk or cycle to school are more physically active during the rest of the day when compared with their peers who are driven to school.

<sup>3</sup> See the website [www.udeskole.dk](http://www.udeskole.dk) and the "Odense Declaration" which is included as an annex.

#### **Re V.5 – Building overweight and obesity prevention into health services**

*Which measures, and at what level, are needed to ensure a stronger integration aiming at promoting healthy diets and physical activity into health services?*

- Organisations concerned with outdoor activities would like to be able to contribute their knowledge and skills. In Denmark, the Danish Outdoor Council has endeavoured to transform/develop the concept of "exercise on prescription" into one of "outdoor activity on prescription" on the basis of the above-mentioned approach to getting outdoors and becoming physically active as opposed to, or in addition to, working out in fitness centres and pursuing indoor activities. Norway has taken a similar approach in its "Green prescriptions" project.<sup>5</sup>
- The organisations concerned with outdoor activities are pressing for support and back-up to enable them to do something for target groups at risk, since many of these organisations' activities are run and developed by volunteers.

#### **Re V.6 – Addressing the obesogenic environment**

*In which ways can public policies contribute to ensure that physical activity be "built into" daily routines?*

- In public areas, transport interchanges etc., using steps can be made more attractive than taking the lift/escalator/moving walkway etc. Signs can be put up to say that lifts are reserved for the disabled. Place humorous or encouraging notices in public places (of the "Did you know that ..." type) suggesting that people should get exercise and burn up energy.
- Decoration of stairwells in bright colours and with "surprises" to encourage people to use the stairs instead of the lift.<sup>6</sup>
- In parks, marketplaces and other urban spaces, play areas can be set up in which both children and adults are encouraged to spend time<sup>7</sup>
- The infrastructure in towns and municipalities should make it an attractive and safe option for all age-groups to cycle or walk.

#### **V.11 – Other issues**

*Are there issues not addressed in the present Green paper which need consideration when looking at the European dimension of the promotion of diet, physical activity and health?*

- As mentioned earlier: OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES. These activities are healthy, often involve a lot of exercise and encourage healthy eating habits. They also give the feeling of being part of nature and appeal to our inner selves, thereby naturally encouraging us to make healthy choices.<sup>8</sup>

*Which of the issues addressed in the present Green paper should receive first priority, and which may be considered less pressing?*

<sup>4</sup> Article in *Berlingske Tidende*, 11 October 2005.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.friluft.no](http://www.friluft.no)

<sup>6</sup> Johan Faskunger, from the National Institute of Public Health (*Folkhälsoinstitutet*) in Sweden, has done research in this area.

<sup>7</sup> Karsten B. Hansen, from the Danish Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University (KVL), has collected examples.

<sup>8</sup> The Danish Outdoor Council has published "*Friluftsliv gi'r sundhed*" – a collection of writings and sources of inspiration on "tacit knowledge" – which can be downloaded from: [www.friluftstraadet.dk/1361](http://www.friluftstraadet.dk/1361)

- Children and young people are very important. Good habits acquired early will benefit them later on. However, bad habits make work infinitely more difficult, and the economic burden on society is all the greater.
- The Nordic countries have a good tradition of providing activities for children and young people, and it is indeed becoming apparent from the WHO's statistics that these countries have

an outstanding record in relation to the rest of the world. It is thus important to draw on the specialised knowledge to be found in the Nordic countries, and to do everything possible to maintain and enhance it. Otherwise the specific Nordic achievement in health terms will perhaps be lost within a half to one generation.

Finally, the Danish Outdoor Council calls on the Commission to seek to coordinate best practices, objectives and declarations from various umbrella organisations both within and outside the EU, such as the WHO reports on health, transport and the environment, the Nordic Council of Ministers' action plans on sustainability and the environment, and the pending report on health and nutrition.

Yours faithfully,

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## **The Odense Declaration**

*Nordic Park Congress & Urban Outdoor Life in the Nordic Countries*

August 26, 2005

**Park administrators, outdoor organisations and researchers in the Nordic countries held a conference in Odense from 24 to 28 August 2005.**

**The focus was on the urban green resources. For visual pleasure, for recreation and as a result of planning, the urban green areas are some of the assets which add to the enjoyment of everyday life.**

**With the Odense Declaration the organisers and the participants at the conference wish to send a joint message to the politicians in the Nordic countries.**

### **Planning:**

- Municipal planning should strive to improve the quality of urban green areas and provide their adequate supply
- Local outdoor and nature organisations should be actively involved in the work of developing urban green public areas.
- Research should focus on how strategic green management can be better integrated in municipal planning to the benefit of holistic urban planning.

### **Communication – health**

- Schools should be encouraged and supported to create opportunities for outdoor teaching.
- Institutions for both children and the elderly should be involved in the urban green areas, including a focus on outdoor life and nature activities in their everyday lives, which also includes activities in the immediate vicinity of the city, urban woodlands and larger nature areas.
- Research should continue to document and expand knowledge about the importance of using urban green areas to benefit the physical and mental health of the population.

### **Accessibility:**

- Recreational areas inside and outside the city should be easily accessible and open for many different activities and target groups. No one should live more than five minutes' walk from a green area.
- Local outdoor and nature organisations should be actively involved in ensuring that green areas near residential areas are inviting for movement, games, exercise and outdoor activities and also have a rich and varied natural life.
- Research should focus on how the numerous administrative and physical barriers in the city can be removed to create coherence and easily accessible green areas.

### **Finance:**

- It should be a public social responsibility to ensure the availability of resources for the development and improvement of existing green areas and areas for relaxation in cities.
- We are always willing to participate in a dialogue with decision-makers concerning visions, objectives and resources for such development.

On behalf of the participants the Odense Declaration is adopted by:

(see reverse page)

## **The Odense Declaration**

*Nordic Park Congress & Urban Outdoor Life in the Nordic Countries*

August 26, 2005

**Park Administrators**

**The Association of Governmental and Municipal Gardeners**

Chairman Peter Bjørno Jensen

**Landslaget for Park og Idrett, Norge**

Chairman Sissel Lerum

**Föreningen Sveriges Stadsträdgårdsmästare**

Chairman Edit Ugrai

**The Organisation for Municipal Park Commissioners, (S.A.M.G.U.S)**

(Samtök garðyrkju- og umhverfisstjóra sveitarfélaga)

Chairman Þórólfur Jónsson

**The Finnish Association of Landscape Industries,**

Pekka Leskinen, (Viherympäristöliitto ry, VYL)

**The Finnish Association of Municipal Supervisors of Parks and Grounds,**

Viljo Muuronen, (Kaupunginpuutarhurien Seura ry, KPS)

**Outdoor Organisations**

**The Danish Outdoor Council**

Vice Chairman Kirsten Nielsen

**The Swedish Outdoor Council, FRISAM**

Chairman Eva Bjernudd

**The Norwegian Outdoor Council, FRIFO**

Vice Chairman Kari Fagernæs

**The Association of Regional Outdoor Councils, FL, Norway**

Secretary General Morten Dåsnes

**Suomen Latu - Central Association for**

**Recreational Sports and Outdoor Activities**

Secretary General Tuomo Jantunen

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