



Networked regions and cities in times of fragmentation: Developing smart, sustainable and inclusive places

Sunday 13th – Wednesday 16th May 2012:

Delft University Technology, Delft, Netherlands

(Excursion, walking tour and evening drinks reception Sunday 13th May)

Call for Papers

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Promoting Health, Reducing Health Inequities and fostering Economic and Social Development: What know-how, innovation and lessons can Regions offer?

Session Organisers:

Dr Erio Ziglio, Head of the WHO European Office for Investment for Health and Development
WHO Regions for Health Network

The countries Europe have recently achieved historically unprecedented levels of health. On average, people now live longer and enjoy better health than ever before.

However, it is of concern that this progress has not been equally enjoyed by all citizens. Differences in the opportunity to be healthy continue to persist between population groups within countries as well as between countries. In some cases these differences are increasing, and they follow a strong social gradient, as demonstrated by the 2008 *WHO Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health* (CSDH), and by the *WHO European Review on the Social Determinants of Health and the Health Divide* in 2012.

The current economic crisis can exacerbate the differences, threaten the gains that have been achieved and undermine social cohesion. Poor health reduces people's chances of success in education and finding satisfying work and increases social costs, creating a drag on future prosperity. Implementing action to promote population health and tackle health inequities must be seen as an integral part of plans for economic recovery in European countries.

Health inequities are defined as *avoidable and unjust systematic differences in health status between different groups*¹ in a given society. In a study supported by the European Commission, Dr Johan Mackenbach and his team estimate that in EU countries alone the persistence of existing health inequities has an annual cost equivalent to:

¹ To learn more on health inequities concepts and principles: Whitehead M, Dahlgren G. (2007). Levelling up (part 1): a discussion paper on concepts and principles for tackling social inequities in health. Studies on social and economic determinants of population health, No.2, WHO Regional Office for Europe. http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/74737/E89383.pdf

- 15% of social security expenditure;
- 20% of health systems costs; and
- a loss of health (considered as a 'capital good') equivalent to €141 billion.²

Inequities in health are not concern only for national governments. It is a concern also at subnational regional level, yet in many countries the regional level has a significant opportunity to take effective action to reduce these inequities, through initiatives across economic, planning and other sectors.

This conference session is an opportunity to take stock of regional experiences and innovation in promoting population health, reducing health inequities and fostering sustainable and equitable regional development. There is an urgent need to analyse what regions do in this complex yet critical domain, systematically to explore what works and what doesn't work in promoting regional health and reducing regional inequities, even when that is not the prime goal.

These issues have recently been taken up by the World Health Organization's Regions for Health Network. The capacity of regions to promote health and tackle health inequities will depend on institutional arrangements, local health challenges, political commitment, the skills and know-how of public health professionals and the active engagement of civil society and policy sectors such as health, employment, education and housing, and factors impacting on national and local development.

The session offers a timely opportunity to review the main lessons and opportunities in improving health and development and the increasingly important role of regions in this domain.

Anyone interested in participating in the session should register for the conference before 10th February 2012 by visiting <http://www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk/events/2012/May-Delft/> and follow the link.

² Mackenbach JP, Meerding, Kunst A. (2007). *Economic implications of socioeconomic inequalities in health in the European Union*. European Commission, 2007, Luxembourg. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/socio_economics/documents/socioeco_inequalities_en.pdf