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# EXCHANGE REPORT



**A Child Friendly Approach – Insights from the exchanges among the SWUP Project Community**

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## WHAT IS THE REPORT ABOUT?

This report is a synthesis of the issues regarding A Child Friendly Approach that have been exchanged in the framework of SWUP project. SWUP (Sport for Women in Urban Places)<sup>1</sup> is a project funded by the Erasmus+ fund of the European Union to enhance women participation in outdoor physical activities. The project's activities are meant to shade light on why and how to design women friendly urban environments for outdoor physical activity.

Other five topics, besides the one addressed in this report, have been identified and discussed by the project's partners: the role of municipality, the role of women in executive sport positions, the desirability of only-for-women activities and infrastructures, local impact generated by outdoor sport activities, activities and infrastructures for disable women.

Information was collected through ad hoc oral exchanges that the partners had during the SWUP project and through the contributions that the project partners and other interested actors exchanged in the online forum<sup>2</sup> hosted in the project website.

This report is organized in 3 sections. The first section will present the topic. The second section will gather and analyze the contributions that the partners and other interested stakeholders exchanged on the topic during the project. Finally, the last section is an expanded biography that reports suggested readings and links on the topic.

## 1. THE TOPIC: WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

The topic that will be dealt with in this Report is the importance that the organization of physical activities by sports bodies and municipalities must give to the factor that we can kindly call the "mother" factor. Reception facilities for children side by side with sports facilities where the mother can perform physical activity in tranquility. We will analyze examples that can be implemented to achieve this purpose, existing structures and services in favor of this objective, policies and incentives that can be transformed into modern and easily accessible by mothers, but also obstacles and barriers encountered in designing child-friendly sports services, adapting them to all age groups. Undoubtedly creating and offering sporting activities that respond not only to the needs of the mother but also to the children is really a difficult challenge but of a very high social impact because this effort leads to a greater participation of the mother woman in the physical activities of her own territory. improving the overall well-being of his person.

This well-being is reflected on the whole family and therefore the benefit extends to all the components in a different but still intense and very important way. Designing solutions of this type favors the performance of physical activity even for mothers who cannot leave their children in custody with paid babysitters due to the high costs on the family budget. Cozy sports courses for children is an optimal solution in many social aspects. It can be said that the achievement of this goal does not bring with it any negative aspect, but only and exclusively advantages and benefits for the whole community.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.swup-project.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.swup-project.eu/forum-swup/>

## 2. KEY ASPECTS FROM THE DEBATE

Women tend to have less leisure time than men as they take on the greater burden of responsibility for housework, childcare and care of elderly or infirm relatives. This is one of the key reasons for not taking part in sport. Women also cite lack of childcare facilities as a major factor discouraging them from taking part in sport and physical activity. This means that, from a policy point of view, it is crucial to investigate options for the provision of childcare, or help with childcare costs, and adopt a child-friendly approach so that women can bring their children with them to the venue.

Having few time is one of the major causes of lower women practice of sport. For this reason, all those measures that decrease the time restrictions given by work and family and make it easy and uncomplicated for them to join in your sport is likely to increase women's sport practice. If there are not the facilities to offer, mothers can be mobilised to share childcare. From surveys carried out in the municipality of Corbetta, it emerged that 39 percent of the female population stops doing sports after the age of 45 due to lack of time. These sedentary women need to be brought back to an active role, rediscovering the practice activity. The Polisportiva Corbetta 2015 ASD deeply thinks that is very important to optimize the time organization of the family in the fields of work, social life, culture and sport. It is essential to remove the objective barriers relating the family time management. In particular, the Association considers essential to become aware of the importance of sport practice in order to improve quality and life expectancy. It is so important to include all kind of women in sport activities such as Working women, middle age women, disabled women, mom working. The sport, the constant training, the discipline and the psychophysical wellbeing consequently helps the woman in managing the long days as wives, mothers, daughters, workers.

### 2.1 FIRST ASPECT: SPORT AND FAMILY, SO MANY VALUES JOIN TOGETHER IN A WINNING COMBINATION

Doing sports has many benefits, including keeping fit, but it is also an aggregating activity, especially for a family: a healthy lifestyle and sport have a positive effect on the health of all the members of the family unit.

Sport can be a tool to promote dialogue, by sharing time together, dedicating oneself to physical activity, allowing dialogue between parents and children, strengthening ties, creating complicity. The important thing is the way in which this experience is dealt with: it must be a moment of escape and fun and of consequent physical well-being. The important thing is to make movement, be together and have fun. Playing sports with children is a way to strengthen parent-child relationships even more, having fun and starting to make them understand the importance of physical activities. Statistics teach us that the knowledge and practice of sport from an early age is very important for the development of social skills and leads to a healthy and healthy lifestyle.

Doing sports is the right choice not only for the well-being of mum and baby but also has great educational value. Children need healthy models and seeing their parents involved in a sport allows children to have points of positive and clean references and values. In this way the parent can become a model that is esteemed and respected. Sport as a tool to promote dialogue. Sharing time together, dedicating oneself to physical activity, allowing dialogue between parents and children, strengthening ties, creating complicity. The good habits that we want to teach to our children begin in oneself, parents are the mirror where our children are reflected, and it is very important to educate with the example. The joint participation is very enriching because favors that the whole family spend moments of fun, collaboration, relaxation, game and bonding that will help their later

on how to do and be at home, as well as being a source of physical and psychological health (increases self-esteem, improves psychomotricity, strengths in social relationships...).

Coming out of everyday life allows a new space for mutual observation, easing tensions and rancor. Sharing the moment of sports training with your children can be a lot of fun. Playing sports with children is a way to strengthen parent-child relationships even more, having fun and starting to make them understand the importance of physical activities. Adolescence is a very difficult phase of life. It is that moment during which the parents, who were seen as heroes as children, start to be questioned. Adolescence is not an easy time neither for the child nor for the parent and often for the parent it becomes very difficult to enter the world of children. Children need healthy models and seeing their parents involved in a sport allows children to have points of positive and clean references and values. In this way the parent can become a model that is esteemed and respected. So doing sports is the right choice not only for the well-being of mum and baby but also has great educational value. The important thing is the way in which this experience is dealt with: it must be a moment of escape and find of consequent physical well-being.

## 2.2 SECOND ASPECT: MANY SPORTS CAN HAVE A CHILD FRIENDLY APPROACH

Any kind of sport activities you choose to practice together is fine. I would like to take the bicycle sport as a first example: You can take long bike rides to discover hidden corners of the cities in which you live. By contacting the cycling associations of the city you can certainly take part in excursions, outings, explorations of areas of the city, parks, countryside on the outskirts. All these activities can be lived with children at any age. The bicycle can become the means to reach a place to explore together and even when it is not far away, the important thing is that you have never visited it: only the fact of getting it all together will be a novelty and a small business. But a trip by bike is worth doing even without a precise destination, for the pleasure of riding in company, struggling and get brave uphill and darting downhill. Other sports that you can practice and learn with your children are: horse riding, basketball, volleyball, climbing. Swimming is the most complete sport and recommended from a muscular point of view since the age of development and for all ages. Swimming redefines the muscles, disposes of excess weight and relieves tension. So you can sign up for swimming lessons all together. All pools in large and small cities offer courses suitable for everyone and for all needs, even at the same time. In this way, while the mother or the parents can swim, the child can participate in courses suitable for his age.

Another sport suitable for the whole family and which can be practiced simultaneously by all the members of the family is walking. If it is virtually impossible to convince children to jog, it is definitely easier to take them to walk. In the mountains, in a park, along a river. There are numerous city associations that organize walking tours around the city. It is said that 7000 steps a day are enough to keep fit and control your weight. You can use the pedometers, measure the speed and everything turns into a good game. Yoga with babies has gained more and more popularity. Besides allowing the mother to take care of their children while doing sport, the camaraderie of postnatal classes often helps offset the sometimes isolating and disorienting stage of early parenthood. In France, a remarkably high number of gyms advertises courses for mother and children with experienced personnel taking care of the physical activities of the two.

Polisportiva Corbetta in the city of Corbetta promotes a child-friendly approach so that women can bring their children with them while practicing sports. Polisportiva Corbetta has always been among its first objectives to offer sporting practices aimed at the whole family, from the youngest child to the oldest one and to the parents. Every year we organize fitness and volleyball courses for all ages, trying to manage the hours of training at the gym in an optimal way to play sports at the same time as mother and child. In addition, the Polisportiva

Corbetta promotes sport at 360 degrees, organizing not only annual courses for each level of skills, but also moments of celebration, aggregation, socialization throughout the year sports. We also have Minivolley Tournaments, Beach Volley tournaments.

In Granollers ( Spain) there are several activities that are offered at local level for practice parents and children simultaneously: In the range of 0 to 3 years old, there are a couple of equipments that offer aquatic activities for babies and psychomotor classes. Being part of these groups help parents to have self-confidence, meet other families that are in the same stage so it generates security and motivates to them to continue doing the activity later. Until three years old, it is easy to find clubs or civic centers that offer sportive activities with family, but what happens after that? It is very common for the boy or girl continue practicing “their sport” and test news in extra-curricular classes. After 3 years old, many sports centers are already incorporating activities for parents who want to continue doing sport with the whole family, such as swimming classes, zumba, aquagym, yoga, tennis . Other option that some private sport center offers is the play center service: while parents are at the sports center, their children are attended by a monitoring service. Usually during this time, children make free games, craft workshops or take the opportunity to do the homework of the school.

### 2.3 THIRD ASPECT: PLAYING SPORT WHILE MY CHILD IS WELCOMED IN A STRUCTURE NEAR ME

For younger children there are fitness centers with baby parking or while the mother practices sports, the young child is left in a space fully equipped for him with highly qualified personnel. The Baby Parking is a structure that has proved to be an excellent alternative to baby sitter and nursery schools. They exist within many sports centers and also constitute an important employment opportunity. They go to combine the needs of the mother and those of the child. The child finds himself in contact with professionals and other children and would get used to learning about the world of sport from an early age.

Gyms with baby parking represent one of the latest trends and ideas born to encourage the mother who otherwise would not be able to devote some of her free time to physical activity. Until a few years ago the baby parking was the prerogative of the largest and most renowned gyms but today we are witnessing the availability of baby parking in many fitness centers. Children can play safely or do their homework or play with other children or in the company of specialized staff. Spaces can also be divided according to the age of the child and the specialized staff takes care of the children with lots of fun and entertaining activities based on their age. In reality they are spaces in which all children of different ages can play even in the absence of parents who can practice physical activity without the constant thought of the needs of their children. The Baby Parking not only meets the needs of parents but also those of children by offering many and varied activities.

As shared by the Sofia European Capital of Sport Foundation, sometimes offering childcare is not sufficient because mothers do not trust the person in charge of the childcare (students). For this reason, it is important to choose a person that can be “objectively” trusted. Besides this, placing the childcare near enough that mothers are able to see it and giving many details about the service can help mothers trusting the service and plan the activity inside their restricted time schedule. As in the case of childcare, organizing children’s activities at the same time of women activities can help those women with young children to take part in the activity. This measure can meet more easily the quest of trust by part of the parents. On the other side, mothers and children could

experience difficulties in finding their preferred activities in the same time slot in case the offer is not very varied.

## 2.4 POLICIES AND INITIATIVES

Every year many sports associations offer families a list of sports activities in contemporary adults-kids or adults-children to save time in home-gym or work-gym transfers and to encourage family relationships. Many sports associations also offer discounts and benefits for parents who sign up for courses in conjunction with courses for children and teenagers. They offer family discounts, free tickets and subscriptions at discounted rates. Playing sports with children is an excellent tool to set a good example of the importance of keeping fit and having fun together. The first thing to do is to choose a center or an association to which you can register and in which we can train at the same time as our child. This has the advantage of doing something that is good for us and for him and would give us the satisfaction of living for the first time a moment together that goes beyond the normal routine. No training sessions of 2 or 3 hours are required. Short workouts are the new frontier of fitness and with 30 minutes of workout the fitness improves quickly.

Practicing a sport with children can be an incentive for mothers to practice a sport. At the same time, there factors as children age, mothers' flexibility and reaction to stress, welcoming or restricting environment and children's temperament that highly influence the choice of the mothers to take part to such an activity. Some of these factors can be tackled by organising these activities in spaces that are sufficiently large for the 2 groups not to bother each other but at the same time keep on being on eye sight, having a good soundproofing. Encouraging the adoption of some informal rules to be followed during the session is also key to make the experience pleasant for every participant while at the same time ensuring enough flexibility for mothers to take care of their children in case it is needed.

Among the many initiatives organised worldwide to engage women and their children in sport, in Australia a 3-month programme delivered enjoyable fitness activities in local parks for women and their families. Always in Australia, Active Mums Noosa" offered 19 group activities over the 20 weeks including activities such as mums and bubs yoga, pilates and box fit. The popularity of this program can in part be attributed to the involvement of the target group in the program planning. A large number of mums completed an online survey indicating their preferences for days, times and location of program activities. The council also involved new mums' groups in focus group style sessions to provide input into the program planning.

The growing interest in the issue can be observed by the number of blogs and articles that can be found online on how to combine childcare and sport. Femme Actuelle Magazine, for example, offers an article with a list of sports that mothers can comfortably practice with children (<https://www.femmeactuelle.fr/enfant/enfants/quel-sport-pratiquer-avec-mon-enfant-2024875>)

As it can be read on the Women and Sport report by the UN, many international conferences have been organized on the topic of women and sport and every of them developed tools and recommendation in order to strengthen women participation in sport. Back in 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth

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World Conference on Women, provided important policy recommendations on women, gender equality and sport already.

Among the other aspects, the Platform calls for the creation and support of programmes in the education system, workplace and community to make opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity available to girls and women of all ages, on the same basis as they are made available to men and boys. In 2002, in view of the Third World Conference on Women and Sport the Montreal Tool Kit was developed as a reference manual containing 20 tools to help women activists working to increase women's participation in sports. More recently, women inclusion in sport activities has been recognised as being a driver for the achievement of many of the SDG goals. Nonetheless, the need to ensure the same access to sport for mothers has still not been fully addressed by international conferences.

National policies and especially ground initiatives seem to be more advanced in the topic. An example of a national initiative is The Get Out, Get Active program from the Queensland Government, in Australia. It provides funding for projects that will deliver community-based sport and recreation activities that increase opportunities for participation by women and girls who are either currently inactive, or would otherwise benefit from further participation. (<https://www.qld.gov.au/recreation/sports/funding/organisations/getoutgetactive>)

For Sofia "Child-friendly care" includes the notion of "family-friendly", facilitating bonding between kids and their mothers, facilitating contacts between the child and his or her mother. After taking part in our events and happenings, the mothers exited, happy and tired. So in the meantime the kids have been animated and become also excited and tired and the most important – willing to come and play again. Therefore, these become a strong impulse to the mothers for coming again. Our aim is to improve the quality and quantity of sports participation to women in providing suitable conditions for them to come and participate with their children. A good example from Sofia.

We agree about sports practice together is positive, it is known that it improves the emotional bond as well as being beneficial to have time with the children when usually the lack of time removes us of these whiles. But we also believe that ideal for the father / mother would be to have time at least twice each week for doing an activity for their own interest.

So, we understand the family practice together as an activity to enjoy the weekend, share a family hobby or enjoying occasional events (family races, family bike ride, tournaments of parent and child...)

For example, parents and baby aerobic classes could incorporate exercises like lunges with pushchairs, encouraging participants to see how they can incorporate physical activity into their daily lives. Finally, making physical activity a part of the working day can help address the lack of time so many women experience. For example, lunchtime walking, running or exercise groups, supported by the employer, can help staff to fit physical activity into a busy working day. A good example of practice could be "Mums on the run" initiative. It is a program designed with a special focus on the needs of mums, which offers guidance, advice and solutions to help mums across the country in enjoying the physiological, social and psychological benefits of getting out and being active. The possibility of taking the baby to the class in the buggy and the flexible organization of the trainings make easier for participants combining childcare with physical exercises.

