

Bridging the Gap - European Alcohol Policy Conference
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Mobilizing Local Communities in Europe

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Definition

Community action for health refers to collective efforts by communities which are directed towards increasing community control over determinants of health, and thereby improving health.

- WHO, Health for All

History

In 1978 the full participation of the community in the multidimensional work of health improvement became one of the pillars of the Health for All movement.

In 1986, the Ottawa Charter identified strengthening community action as one of the five key priorities for proactive health creation.

Evidence

Community approach has proven to be successful in many areas of public health (communicable diseases, illegal drugs).

There is evidence that local communities can have an impact on support for policy and also on the way alcohol issues were conceived by opinion leaders.

Local community interventions can also be effective in reducing alcohol related harm.

Evidence

The greatest promise are the community based and community wide preventive public health approaches that focus on both individual and environmental influences.

Comprehensive community programs have positive effect on health choices.

Community interventions can be effective in reducing alcohol involved traffic accidents, under age sales and increasing responsible beverage service and implementation of laws.

Evidence

The actual capacity of communities to participate in defining and implementing health agendas has been limited by resource constraints, entrenched professional and social hierarchies and public health models focused on individual behaviours and curative biomedical interventions.

Local context, its strengths, weaknesses and specifics are seldom taken in consideration. Actions are often project based and lack continuity.

Some characteristics of successful LC action

- ❑ Ownership of the initiative by the target community - social acceptance
- ❑ Building capacities by using existing structures, assuring sustainability
- ❑ Realistic goals and plans, based on local evidence, existent legislation, resources and available funding.

Some characteristics of successful LC action

- Partners in the community working closely together with clear lines of responsibility.
- LC action part of an organized programme not a set of disjointed activities.

Involving partners from different sectors and an intersectoral commitment should also be considered as a precondition for a successful public health programme and as an assurance for its continuity.

Some characteristics of successful LC action

- Shared vision by experts and stakeholders
- Political commitment across all sectors and strong leadership in place.

Some characteristics of successful LC action

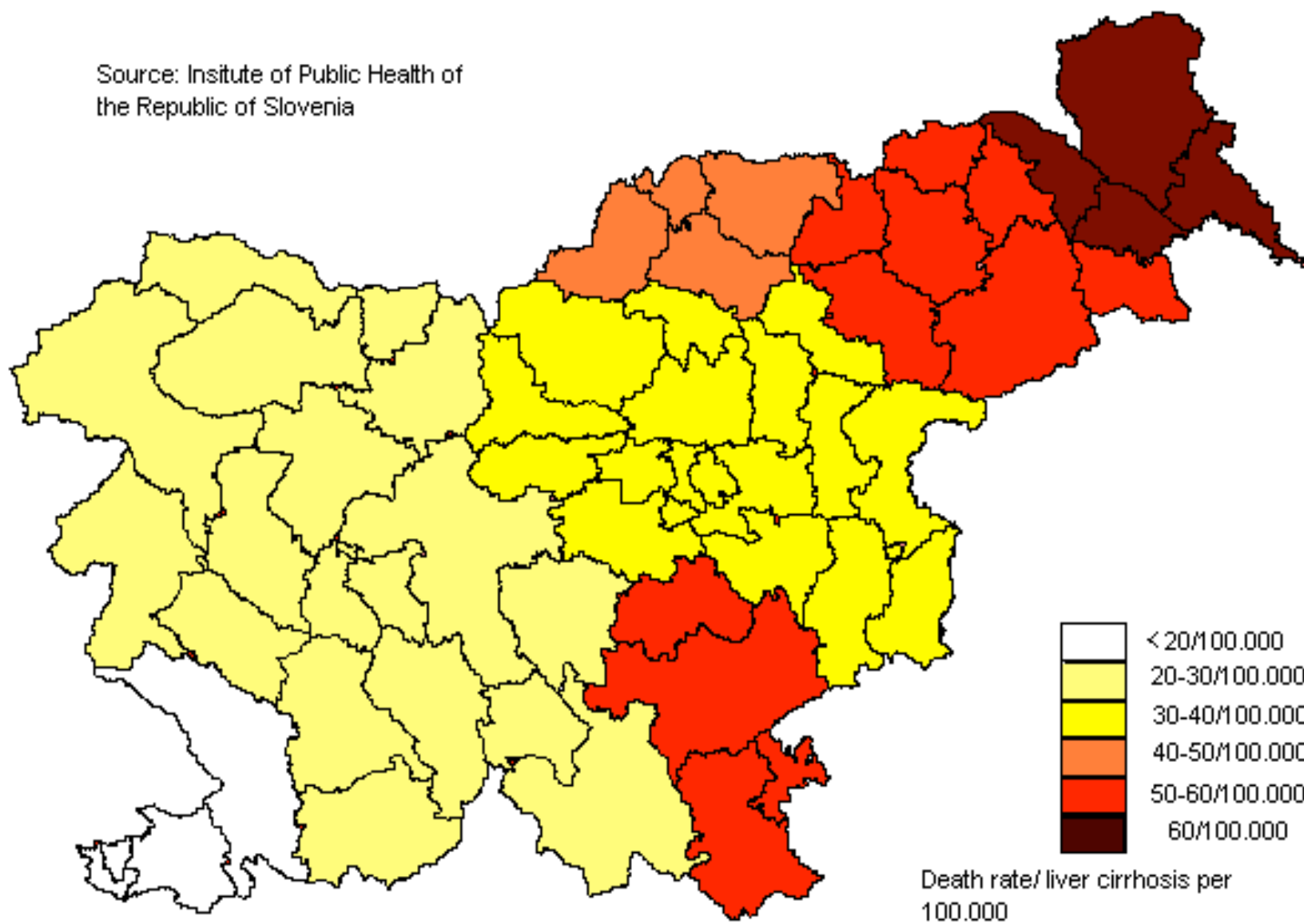
- Respecting diversity and using existing resources
- Good partnerships
- Political commitment across all sectors and strong leadership



Some characteristics of successful LC action

Respecting diversity and using
existing resources

Source: Insitute of Public Health of
the Republic of Slovenia



Poland

- ❑ Long history of well organized action against insobriety since first half of XIX century.
- ❑ Grass root movements against drunkenness were a way of demonstrating patriotism.

Slovenia

- ❑ Only very recently preventing alcohol related harm has become a priority on political agenda.
- ❑ Alcohol production and drinking has been a subject of national pride (vine celebrated in the national hymn)

Organizational structures

- State agency for prevention of alcohol Problems
- Regional coordinating bodies for alcohol prevention
- Local community committees for alcohol prevention
- Ministry of Health
- National Public Health Institute
- Committee for prevention of road traffic accidents
- Regional Public health institutes

Funding

- Local communities collect money from local alcohol sellers
- Regional self governments collect money from wholesale dealers of beer and wine
- National budget
- National insurance fund
- State budget
- Local community budget – limited amount and not stable

Conclusion

No universal model exists that could be successfully used and replicated in communities around Europe.

Goals and strategies might be common, but culture and values on which priorities are based depend on political, cultural and socioeconomic context.

Diversity of LO structures and funding in Europe presents a challenge but also an opportunity for innovation and implementation of locally appropriate



Some characteristics of successful LC action

Good partnerships

Poland/Slovenia - Main partners

- NGOs
- Alcohol treatment centres
- Local authorities
- Church
- Police
- Regional public health institutes
- Primary health care centres
- NGOs
- Local media
- Police

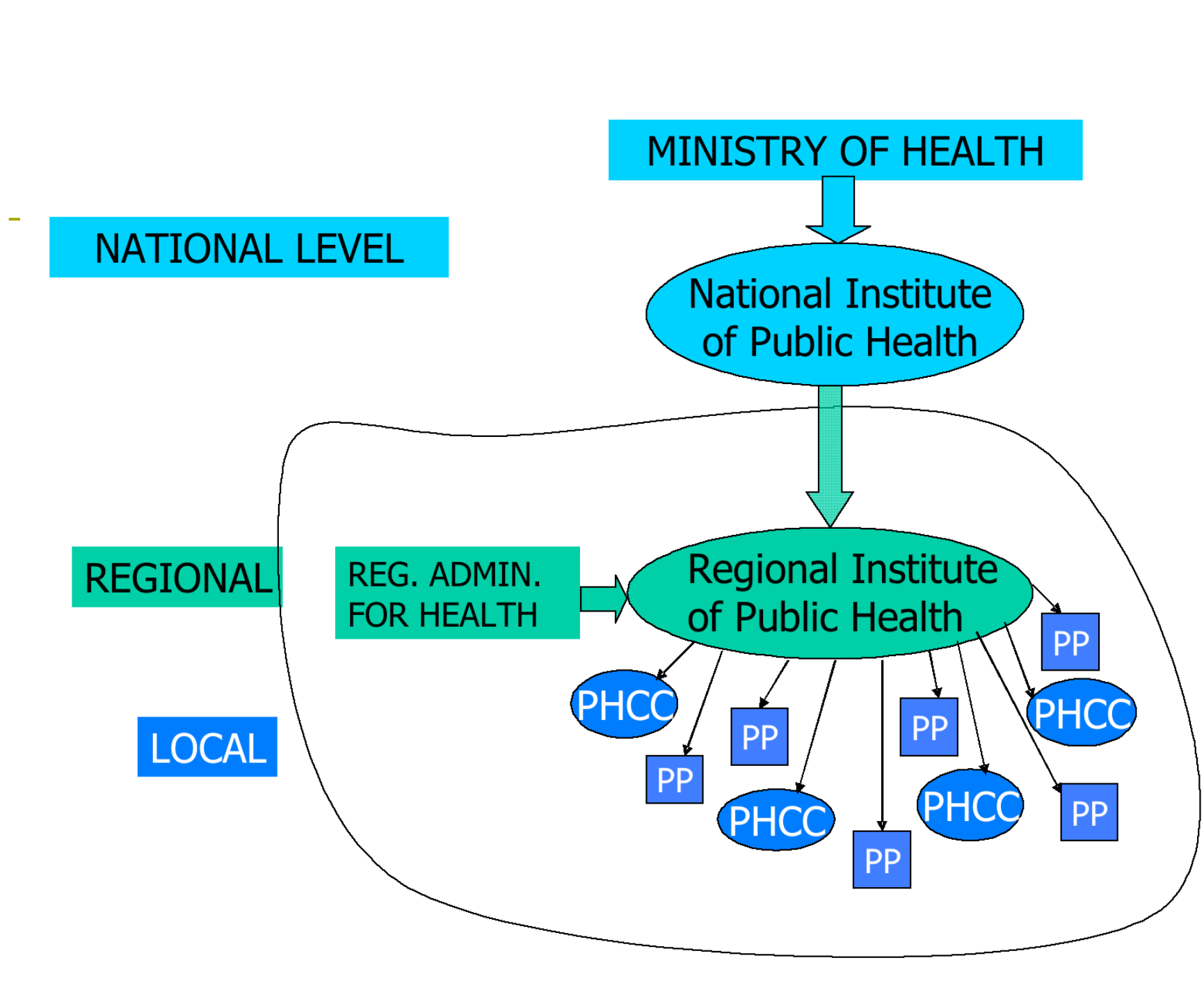
Partnership

In contrast with western societies and also Poland, civil society in Slovenia is still developing and does not represent a potent partner except in case of some traditional humanitarian organizations and recently established NGOs dealing with violence or promoting alcohol free events.

International initiatives such as WHO CINDI, Healthy Cities, Health Schools are important at local level.

Partnership

On the other hand regional public health institutes in Slovenia present an important partner to local governments together with local health care centres in implementing national policies at local level and creating tailored action in the local community. They fulfil their role as regional promoters, co-ordinators and, in part, organizers of health promoting and primary prevention activities.



Conclusions

- Every community with its structures and relations between them represents unique opportunity for creating successful partnerships.
- Development of partnership cooperation and strong coalitions for the common welfare of society is of vital importance when dealing with a general social problem as harm related to alcohol.

Conclusions

- International initiatives and networks can also be important partners for local communities in providing information on best practices, stimulating monitoring and evaluation and creating political commitment.

Some characteristics of successful LC action

Political Commitment across all
sectors and strong leadership

Commitment/Leadership

- In a long process of establishing successful public health programmes in tobacco control political commitment has been gained at all levels through a long lasting public health advocacy.
- One of the most important principles of community health advocacy is that you should include many representatives of the community in your efforts.

Advocacy

Five questions to be asked have been developed by American Cancer Society to advocate tobacco control and could be easily used in the field of alcohol control:

- ❑ What do we want? (The objective)
- ❑ Who can give it to us? (Those whom we need to convince; the target audience)
- ❑ What do they need to hear? (Effective messages)
- ❑ Whom do they need to hear it from? (The most effective messengers)
- ❑ How do we get them to hear it? (Creative strategies for getting their attention)

Commitment/Leadership

Political commitment is often missing and although there is enough evidence available, policy makers do not listen to science.

It is subject to many ongoing processes- formal and informal.

Sometimes it takes a charismatic advocate to achieve political commitment for action and sometimes political commitment is gained by media pressure or pressure of groups of people or individuals who have suffered from the consequences of neglected public health problem.

Conclusions

- ❑ One of the tools to gain political commitment is advocacy.
- ❑ One of the most important principles of community health advocacy is that you should include many representatives of the community in your efforts.
- ❑ International networks gathering partners from national and local environments are the right place to translate evidence to political arguments and share it with others.

To conclude:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead