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The history of the Sports Club for Health movement in Europe

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Abstract

The Sports Club for Health (SCforH) movement is the largest and one of the most comprehensive initiatives for the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity in European sports clubs. In this book chapter we systematically reviewed and catalogued the key activities, published outputs, and recognitions of the SCforH movement in the past 15 years. As a source of information, we used the SCforH-related publications identified in a systematic scoping review. The draft historical overview was then reviewed and approved by nine SCforH experts. Numerous activities have been carried out as part of the SCforH movement. Key contributions to the development of the SCforH movement have been made by 38 organisations from 18 countries that were partners in the three international SCforH projects funded by the European Union. The key milestones in terms of activities were the establishment of the HEPA Europe SCforH working group and successful realisation of three international, funded SCforH projects worth more than 1 million Euro. The SCforH guidelines and invitation to the SCforH online course were distributed to a total of 1,880 and 3,809 stakeholders in the sports sector from 36 European countries. A total of 47 SCforH events with more than 2,000 attendees, including 25 international meetings, 3 seminars, 11 workshops, 7 symposia, and 1 conference have been organised. Key published outputs of the SCforH movement are the three versions of SCforH guidelines, Electronic Toolkit for sports clubs and associations, SCforH online course, SCforH textbook, SCforH country cards, and the database of SCforH and other related initiatives. The Council of the European Union has recognised the importance of the SCforH movement and listed the implementation of SCforH guidelines as one of the 23 recommended indicators for evaluation of health-enhancing physical activity levels and policies in the European Union member states. The indicator has later been used by the European Union Physical Activity Focal Points Network, established by the European Commission and World Health Organization. The European Commission has recognised the SCforH 2015-17 project as a “success story” and example of good practice. The rich history of the SCforH movement described in this book chapter should encourage the stakeholders in the European sports sector to keep on supporting and promoting the use of SCforH guidelines among sports clubs and associations.

1. Introduction

The Sports Club for Health (SCforH) movement encompasses all activities undertaken with the aim to facilitate the use of SCforH guidelines in sports clubs (1-4). It is the largest and one of the most comprehensive initiatives for the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity in European sports clubs (5), with a strong representation in academic publications and online media (6). The number of organisations involved in the SCforH movement has been continuously increasing since its establishment in 2008 (3, 4). This has been followed by a simultaneous increase in the awareness of SCforH guidelines among sports clubs and associations (7, 8), which resulted in a large number of initiatives implemented in accordance with the SCforH principles (9). This progress has been facilitated primarily by three large international projects that were funded by the European Union and carried out by more than 50 experts in sport and health promotion from Europe and Australia (10).

It is likely that the number of contributors to the SCforH movement will keep on growing, and new contributors to the SCforH movement may not be familiar with the full scope of SCforH-related activities that have already been carried out. While some activities of the SCforH movement have been described in previous publications (2, 4, 5), a detailed description of the history of the SCforH movement is not available. Hence, in this book chapter we systematically reviewed and catalogued the key activities, published outputs, and recognitions of the SCforH movement in the past 15 years.

2. Methods

As a source of information for drafting the list of key activities, published outputs, and recognitions of the SCforH movement, we used the SCforH-related publications identified in a systematic scoping review (6), reports from the HEPA Europe annual meetings (11-27), and authors' personal archives. These documents were reviewed by one author (Željko Pedišić) in December 2022. In the next step, nine SCforH experts (Herbert Hartmann, Stjepan Heimer, Danijel Jurakić, Sami Kokko, Pasi Koski, Matleena Livson, Ulla Nykänen, Pekka Oja, and Jorma Savola) reviewed the list and provided suggestions for additional items. The final list of key activities, published outputs, and recognitions of the SCforH movement was verified and approved by all authors of this book chapter. We listed the items in chronological order, and presented a summary of the historical development of SCforH movement in a timeline chart. We also created a list of organisations that were involved in the realisation of international SCforH projects funded by the European Union.

3. Chronological overview of the SCforH movement

The selected milestone events in the development of the SCforH movement are presented in Figure 1. A full list and descriptions of key activities, published outputs, and recognitions of the SCforH movement is presented thereafter by year.

FIGURE 1. SELECTED MILESTONE EVENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SPORTS CLUB FOR HEALTH (SCFORH) MOVEMENT



Note: TAFISA = The Association For International Sport for All; HEPA = health-enhancing physical activity

2008

- Following preliminary conceptualisation of the SCforH idea in Finland, the SCforH concept was for the first time publicly presented to international audience in Helsinki, Finland, at the 2nd workshop of The Association For International Sport for All (TAFISA) and European Sport for All Network (ESFAN) organised by the Finnish Sport for All Association and entitled “Sports Club for Health”. The workshop was organised as part of a project led by the Finnish Sport for All Association and supported by the the Finnish Ministry of Education. Representatives of the International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA) and the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO) participated in the workshop, alongside other attendees. Outcomes of the workshop provided a basis for the future development of the SCforH approach.
- A symposium entitled “Sport for health: it is time for the sport community to become a real player for HEPA” was held at the 1st HEPA Europe conference in Glasgow, United Kingdom.
- The HEPA Europe SCforH working group has been established, with the aim to support the development of SCforH concepts and activities.
- Jorma Savola from the Finnish Sport for All Association was elected as the leader of the HEPA Europe SCforH working group.

2009

- The original SCforH guidelines were published by The Association For International Sport for All (TAFISA), HEPA Europe, and Finnish Sport for All Association (2).
- The SCforH guidelines were presented at the SCforH workshop held in Helsinki, Finland, to 19 participants from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Mexico, and Sweden, including representatives of the International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA) and the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO).
- The SCforH guidelines were also presented at the HEPA Europe SCforH working group meeting that was held as part of the HEPA Europe annual meeting in Bologna, Italy. The session was attended by 16 participants.
- The SCforH movement was recognised by the European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture, and supported with a project grant of 72,704 Euro from December 2009 to March 2011, as part of the “Preparatory Actions in the Field of Sport.” The project titled “Sports Club for Health” (hereafter abbreviated as “SCforH 2009-11 project”) was coordinated by the Finnish Sport for All Association (Finland), and included the following partner, associate and supporting institutions: Cultural and Scientific Association of Tourism, Leisure and Sport (Spain); Estonian Sport for All Association (Estonia); European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation - ENGSO (Sweden); European Federation for Company Sport - EFCS (France); Federation of International Sports, Aerobics and Fitness - FISAF (Czech Republic); German Gymnastic Federation (Germany); Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences (Finland); International Sport and Culture Association - ISCA (Denmark); The Association For International Sport for All - TAFISA (Germany); Italian Aerobic and Fitness Federation (Italy); Ministry of Sport and Tourism (Poland); UKK Institute for Health Promotion Research (Finland); University of Jyväskylä (Finland); Vierumäki Sport Institute of Finland (Finland); University of Oxford (United Kingdom); University of Turku (Finland); and University of Zagreb (Croatia). The project was led by Jorma Savola.

2010

- The SCforH 2009-11 project consortium organised thematic workshops in Jyväskylä (Finland), Warsaw (Poland) and Eindhoven (Netherlands). In total, 51 participants attended the workshops.
- A HEPA Europe SCforH working group meeting was held at the 2nd HEPA Europe conference in Olomouc, Czech Republic and attended by 16 participants.

2011

- The second version of SCforH guidelines was published by the Finnish Sport for All Association (3). The guidelines were later translated from English to Croatian, Finnish, Hebrew, and Polish.
- The final symposium organised as part of the SCforH 2009-11 project was held in Vantaa, Finland, and attended by 41 participants from 15 countries, including representatives of European umbrella sports organisations and a representative of the European Commission.
- SCforH concepts and guidelines were presented at the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO) forum in Brussels, Belgium, and at The Association For International Sport for All (TAFISA) World Congress in Antalya, Türkiye.
- A HEPA Europe SCforH working group meeting was held at the 3rd HEPA Europe conference in Amsterdam, Netherlands.
- Eerika Laalo-Häikiö from the Finnish Sport for All Association joined Jorma Savola from the Finnish Sport for All Association in co-leading the HEPA Europe SCforH working group as a deputy leader.
- Dissemination of the SCforH guidelines has commenced through HEPA Europe SCforH working group members, digital media and European umbrella sports organisations.

2012

- A SCforH workshop was held in Siauliai, Lithuania.
- A SCforH workshop organised by The Association For International Sport for All (TAFISA) and the Iran Sport for All Federation was held in Tehran, Iran.
- The SCforH guidelines were distributed to member organisations of The Association For International Sport for All (TAFISA) and the International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA).
- A SCforH workshop for the European Federation for Company Sport (EFCS) members was held in Jurmala, Latvia.
- A HEPA Europe SCforH working group meeting was held at the HEPA Europe annual meeting in Cardiff, United Kingdom.

2013

- The Council of the European Union proposed the implementation of SCforH guidelines as one of the 23 indicators for evaluation of health-enhancing physical activity levels and policies in the European Union.
- The Finnish Sport for All Association organised a national SCforH seminar in Finland.
- A HEPA Europe SCforH working group meeting was held at the 4th HEPA Europe conference in Helsinki, Finland.

2014

- A HEPA Europe SCforH working group meeting was held at the 5th HEPA Europe conference in Zurich, Switzerland.
- Sami Kokko from the University of Jyväskylä (Finland) was elected as the leader and Aoife Lane from the Waterford Institute of Technology (Ireland) as the deputy leader of the HEPA Europe SCforH working group.
- The dissemination of the SCforH guidelines continued through HEPA Europe SCforH working group members, digital media, and European umbrella sports organisations.

2015

- The SCforH consortium received an Erasmus+ Collaborative Partnerships grant of 455,015 Euro for the project entitled “Promoting National Implementation for Sports Club for Health (SCforH) Programmes in EU Member States” (hereafter abbreviated as “SCforH 2015-17 project”). The project was led by Valo, Finnish Sports Confederation (Finland), and included the following partner and supporting institutions: European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation – ENGSO (Sweden); Equestrian Federation of Finland (Finland); Finnish Boxing Association (Finland); Finnish Gymnastics Federation (Finland); Finnish Sports Federation – Ostrobothnia region (Finland); Finnish Swimming Association (Finland); Gaelic Athletic Association (Ireland); German Gymnastic Federation (Germany); Gymnastics Federation of Flanders (Belgium), International Sport and Culture Association – ISCA (Denmark), Örebro University (Sweden); Palacký University (Czech Republic); Southern Finland Sports Federation (Finland); Swedish Sport Confederation (Sweden); University of Jyväskylä (Finland); University of Leuven (Belgium); University of Turku (Finland); University of Zagreb (Croatia); and Waterford Institute of Technology (Ireland). The project managers at different stages of the project were Pekka Nikulainen (proposal phase), Matleena Livson (first phase of the project), and Ulla Nykänen (second phase of the project). The project was coordinated by Timo Hämäläinen.
- SCforH project team meetings were held in Helsinki (Finland) and Leuven (Belgium).
- The World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe included SCforH-related questions in the survey that is part of the monitoring framework for the implementation of the Council Recommendation on promoting HEPA across sectors in the European Union.
- A HEPA Europe SCforH working group meeting was held at the 6th HEPA Europe conference in Istanbul, Türkiye.

2016

- The SCforH guidelines were distributed via email to a total of 1,880 stakeholders in the sports sector from 36 European countries, including 137 members of the HEPA Europe network and 1,743 representatives of sports associations.
- SCforH project team meetings were held in Helsinki (Finland), Prague (Czech Republic), and Stockholm (Sweden).
- The first SCforH survey was conducted among nearly 600 stakeholders in the European sports sector, including representatives of European sports organisations, national sports associations, and HEPA Europe member organisations.
- A SCforH symposium titled “Sports Club for Health (SCforH) movement in the European Union: Are we moving in the right direction?” was held at the 7th HEPA Europe conference in Belfast, United Kingdom and attended by more than 50 participants.
- A HEPA Europe SCforH working group meeting was held at the 7th HEPA Europe conference in Belfast, United Kingdom.

2017

- The third version of SCforH guidelines was published by the Finnish Olympic Committee (4).
- The SCforH guidelines (4) were translated to Finnish, French, German, and Swedish.
- The SCforH Electronic Toolkit was developed as an interactive guide for the implementation of SCforH initiatives in sports clubs and associations.
- SCforH project team meetings were held in Helsinki (Finland) and Leuven (Belgium).
- A SCforH seminar for policymakers was held at the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium. More than 50 participants attended the seminar in person and more than 300 people participated via teleconference. The seminar included an expert panel discussion, including the representatives of European Commission, European Olympic Committee, and European Athletics.
- A SCforH symposium was held at the 8th HEPA Europe conference in Zagreb, Croatia and attended by more than 20 participants.
- A HEPA Europe SCforH working group meeting was held at the 8th HEPA Europe conference in Zagreb, Croatia.
- The SCforH approach was presented to the International Olympic Committee.
- The official SCforH website was created
- The official SCforH social media profiles were created on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

2018

- The European Commission has recognised the SCforH 2015-17 project as one of the 54 examples of good practice and one of the 34 “success stories” from a total of 541 projects funded by the Erasmus+ Sport programme in the period from 2014 to 2018.
- A HEPA Europe SCforH working group meeting was held at the HEPA Europe annual meeting in London, United Kingdom.
- The dissemination of the SCforH guidelines continued through HEPA Europe SCforH working group members, digital media, and European umbrella sports organisations.

2019

- A HEPA Europe SCforH working group meeting was held at the 10th HEPA Europe conference in Odense, Denmark.
- Aurélie Van Hoyer from the University of Lorraine (France) and Susanna Geidne from the Örebro University (Sweden) were elected as co-leaders of the HEPA Europe SCforH working group.

2020

- The SCforH consortium received an Erasmus+ Collaborative Partnerships grant of 398,845 Euro for the project entitled “Creating Mechanisms for Continuous Implementation of the Sports Club for Health Guidelines in the European Union” (hereafter abbreviated as “SCforH 2020-22 project”). The project was led by the Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Zagreb (Croatia) and included the following partner institutions: European Federation for Company Sport – EFCS (France); European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation – ENGSO (Sweden); Gaelic Athletic Association (Ireland); German Gymnastic Federation (Germany); International Sport and Culture Association – ISCA (Denmark); KU Leuven (Belgium); Örebro University (Sweden); Palacký University Olomouc (Czech Republic); Technological University of the Shannon (Ireland); National School, University and Leisure Sport Federation (Hungary); University of Belgrade (Serbia); University of Graz (Austria); University of Jyväskylä (Finland); University of Lorraine (France); University of Turku (Finland); and Victoria University (Australia). The project was co-led by Danijel Jurakić and Željko Pedišić.
- Two SCforH project team meetings were held; one in Zagreb (Croatia) and the other via teleconference. They were attended by 21 and 16 participants, respectively.
- The official SCforH website was redesigned and its content was updated and significantly expanded.

2021

- The SCforH online course was developed and launched. It included 7 units with educational videos, interactive infographics, and quizzes, and it was made available in 25 languages (all official languages of the European Union and Serbian).
- Invitations to participate in the SCforH online course were distributed via email to a total of 3,809 stakeholders in the sports sector from 36 European countries, including 327 policy-makers, 2,646 representatives of sports associations, 323 public health researchers and promoters, and 513 higher education teachers.
- Two SCforH project team meetings were held via teleconference and attended by 35 participants.
- A SCforH international symposium for sports clubs and associations was held via teleconference and attended by 116 participants.
- A SCforH workshop for the European Union Physical Activity Focal Points Network was held via teleconference and attended by 30 participants.
- Two SCforH workshops for physical education teachers in Croatia were held via teleconference and attended by 810 participants.

- The second SCforH survey was conducted among more than 700 stakeholders in the European sports sector, including policymakers, representatives of sports clubs and associations, public health researchers and promoters, and higher education teachers in the areas of health promotion, physical education, and sports science.
- The official SCforH profile was created on Instagram.

2022

- The SCforH textbook (5) was published.
- The SCforH country cards (28) were published.
- The database of SCforH and other related initiatives was created (9).
- SCforH project team meetings were held in Zagreb (Croatia; 2 meetings) and Leuven (Belgium) and attended by 19, 16, and 17 participants, respectively.
- A SCforH international symposium for current and future stakeholders in the sports sector was held via teleconference and attended by 76 participants.
- An international SCforH conference for sports clubs and associations titled “Improving health through sport” was held in Zagreb (Croatia) and attended by 130 participants.
- A SCforH symposium titled “Sports Club for Health (SCforH) approach: evidence on importance and examples of implementation activities” was held at the 11th HEPA Europe conference in Nice, France and attended by more than 40 participants.
- A HEPA Europe SCforH working group meeting was held at the 11th HEPA Europe conference in Nice, France.
- A SCforH seminar was held in Brussels (Belgium) and attended by 69 participants, including a representative of the European Commission.

4. Contributing organisations

Key contributions to the development of the SCforH movement have been made by the organisations that were partners in the three international SCforH projects funded by the European Union. These projects included a total of 38 partner organisations from 18 countries (Table 1). Of these organisations, twenty-six (70.3%) were included in only one of the SCforH projects, five (13.5%) were included in two SCforH projects, and six (16.2%) were included in all three SCforH projects. The six organisations whose representatives participated in all three projects are the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO), German Gymnastic Federation (Germany), International Sport and Culture Association – ISCA (Denmark), University of Jyväskylä (Finland), University of Turku (Finland), and University of Zagreb (Croatia). Most of the partners in the international SCforH projects funded by the European Union were sports organisations (54.1%), followed by tertiary education and research institutions (43.2%), and governmental bodies (2.7%). Two of the funded SCforH projects were led by sports organisations from Finland and one by an academic institution from Croatia.

TABLE 1. PARTNERS IN THE INTERNATIONAL SPORTS CLUB FOR HEALTH (SCFORH) PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

Partner organisation	Country	SCforH project
Athlone Institute of Technology / Technological University of the Shannon	Ireland	2020-22
Cultural and Scientific Association of Tourism, Leisure and Sport	Spain	2009-11
Equestrian Federation of Finland	Finland	2015-17
Estonian Sport for All Association	Estonia	2009-11
Etelä-Suomen Liikunta ja Urheilu ry	Finland	2015-17
European Federation for Company Sport (EFCS)	France	2009-11; 2020-22
European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO)	Sweden	2009-11; 2015-17; 2020-22
Federation of International Sports, Aerobics and Fitness (FISAF)	Czech Republic	2009-11
Finnish Gymnastics Federation	Finland	2015-17
Valo, Finnish Sports Confederation / Finnish Olympic Committee	Finland	2015-17
Finnish Sport for All Association	Finland	2009-11
Finnish Swimming Association	Finland	2015-17
Gaelic Athletic Association	Ireland	2015-17; 2020-22
German Gymnastic Federation	Germany	2009-11; 2015-17; 2020-22
Gymnastics Federation of Flanders	Belgium	2015-17
Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences	Finland	2009-11
International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA)	Denmark	2009-11; 2015-17; 2020-22
Italian Aerobic and Fitness Federation	Italy	2009-11
KU Leuven	Belgium	2015-17; 2020-22
Ministry of Sport and Tourism	Poland	2009-11
National School, University and Leisure Sport Federation	Hungary	2020-22

Örebro University	Sweden	2015-17; 2020-22
Palacky University Olomouc	Czech Republic	2015-17; 2020-22
Pohjanmaan Liikunta ja Urheilury	Finland	2015-17
Swedish Sports Confederation	Sweden	2015-17
The Association For International Sport for All (TAFISA)	Germany	2009-11
UKK Institute for Health Promotion Research	Finland	2009-11
University of Belgrade	Serbia	2020-22
University of Graz	Austria	2020-22
University of Jyväskylä	Finland	2009-11; 2015-17; 2020-22
University of Lorraine	France	2020-22
University of Oxford	United Kingdom	2009-11
University of Turku	Finland	2009-11; 2015-17; 2020-22
University of Zagreb	Croatia	2009-11; 2015-17; 2020-22
Victoria University	Australia	2020-22
Vierumäki Sport Institute of Finland	Finland	2009-11
Waterford Institute of Technology	Ireland	2015-17

5. Discussion and conclusion

As it can be seen from the chronological overview, numerous activities have been carried out as part of the SCforH movement. Arguably, the key milestones in terms of activities were the establishment of the HEPA Europe SCforH working group and successful realisation of three international SCforH projects funded by the European Union grants of 926,564 Euro and with a total value of more than 1 million Euro. As part of the funded projects, the SCforH guidelines and invitation to the SCforH online course were distributed to a total of 1,880 and 3,809 stakeholders in the sports sector from 36 European countries, respectively. Organising events was also an important part of SCforH activities. In the chronological overview, we listed a total of 47 SCforH events with more than 2,000 attendees, including 25 international meetings, 3 seminars, 11 workshops, 7 symposia, and 1 conference, but there were also many more smaller, local-level events that we did not count in. Key published outputs of the SCforH movement are the three versions of SCforH guidelines, Electronic Toolkit for sports clubs and associations, SCforH online course, SCforH textbook, SCforH country cards, and the database of SCforH

and other related initiatives. All the activities and published outputs have collectively led to a significant increase in the awareness and use of SCforH guidelines in Europe (7).

The importance of SCforH movement from a public health perspective has been recognised at the highest political level in Europe. This is best demonstrated by the fact that the Council of the European Union has listed the implementation of SCforH guidelines as one of the 23 recommended indicators for evaluation of health-enhancing physical activity levels and policies in the European Union member states. Importantly, the European Union Physical Activity Focal Points Network, established by the European Commission and World Health Organization, has since used this indicator to assess the national progress in physical activity promotion. The success of the SCforH movement is demonstrated by the fact that the European Commission has recognised the SCforH 2015-17 project as a “success story” and example of good practice.

It is clear that the most productive periods in the history of the SCforH movement were during the three funded SCforH projects. For the future progress of the SCforH movement, it is therefore of utmost importance to secure additional funding for large collaborative projects. The authors hope that the rich history of the SCforH movement described in this book chapter will encourage the stakeholders in the European sports sector to keep on supporting and promoting the use of SCforH guidelines among sports clubs and associations.

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