

## Lahti, Finland: “Prevent non-communicable diseases and promote health and well-being while reducing biodiversity loss and climate change”

### Interview with

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### *La Santé en action: Since when, why et what main actions have you implemented on urban planning favourable to health?*

In 1970s, Lahti was an industrial town with a polluted environment. Lake Vesijärvi was severely polluted with garbage, sewage and industrial emissions. The industry, municipalities, researchers, and residents initiated a joint cleaning project that is still ongoing today. The City of Lahti earned its European Green Capital Award<sup>1</sup> for a long-term action in environmental field. The Land Use and Building Act and national land use guidelines provide general guidance for land use planning for cities in Finland. Lahti's latest master plan 2017–2020 combines the planning of land use and sustainable urban mobility plan in a way that is unique in Finland: vibrant city centres, attractive neighbourhoods, business life, services, and natural environments all together. The interaction in the process between citizens, decision-makers, experts, and other cooperation partners is important. It changed the traffic plan to sustainable urban mobility plan which includes biking, walking as well and added ‘all together’ as the unique feature of planning in Finnish context. Each city council in every 4 years accepts the plan, but rarely in combined manner as in the City of Lahti.

### *S. A.: What are the objectives of your the Naturestep to Health Programme 2022-2032?*

Inspired by a strong collaboration between the City of Lahti, the Joint Authority for Health and Welfare and the Lahti University Campus, the Naturestep to Health Programme 2022–2032 was created to extend the ecological achievements into the enhanced well-being of the inhabitants. The programme integrates health and environmental goals to find new ways and perceptions to prevent non-communicable diseases and promote health and well-being while reducing biodiversity loss and climate change. The programme is a joint effort in collaboration with the national institutes of natural resources, environment, health and welfare as well as regional actors and research and education institutes. It consists of several multisectoral and interdisciplinary projects, actions, and events in the areas on healthy and sustainable nutrition, mobility and physical activity, healthy living environment, and connection to the nature. The research, development and experimental projects are implemented by the research institutes and coordinating authorities.

### *S. A.: Could you cite concrete examples of what has been done?*

Some of the most recent activities implemented are in connection to the Lahti's EU Green City Programme and climate partnership. The Gerontological Care Centre of Päijät-Sote implemented a climate smart service improvement with food and cleaning service companies to reduce food waste, increase plant-based meals, enhance nature connection within personnel and customers and decrease waste including the use of adult incontinence pads. All activities improved the well-being of personnel and customers as well as sense of environmental care.

Moreover, in the child health centre, the interview protocol of nurses and midwives with their patients during consultations was readjusted to include climate change and lifestyle issues, such as plant-based meals, consumption, and active mobility. The renewed and successful interview protocol is integrated to all child health centres in the City of Lahti. Furthermore, the programme is involved in building green structures into child day-care centres to support microbial biodiversity and enabling the utilisation of forest areas surrounding local hospital and healthcare services to promote nature contacts among healthcare personnel and customers.

### *S. A.: What are the main favourable levers for intervention and the difficulties to be overcome?*

The programme has generated new collaboration between various actors both in health and environmental sectors, but mapping interdependencies further beyond is an important task as well. The impact and efficacy of the programme is planned to be monitored using statistical data, surveys, questionnaires, and multidisciplinary studies. The aim is to improve the implementation of good practices through multidisciplinary collaboration between various sectors including health and social service, environmental actors, city planners, researchers, and practitioners as well as active citizens. ■

**Interview recorded by the editorial team**

1. [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/european-green-capital-award\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/european-green-capital-award_en)