

looking ahead

Joining hands, crossing boundaries

One of the major characteristics of the REC is that it operates in a variety of regions: EU member states of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as EU enlargement, candidate and potential candidate countries. Beyond its country office network, the REC also acts as a bridge across borders and between national governments, NGOs, local governments and citizens. SEARCH II is an example of a project whose scope reaches beyond our organisational network and transports experiences from one region to another, namely EECCA-region countries such as Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

However, SEARCH II is not only outstanding in its geographical scope. The project has also been hailed as one of the top 12 REC projects currently running. With the combined involvement of 10 represented countries, 101 participating schools, and more than 55 experts providing targeted advice and expertise, SEARCH II replicates major EU and WHO international initiative frameworks for Environment and Health. The final outcomes of this project will have an impact on European legal and policy frameworks for sustainability, and at the same time generate the exchange of information and good practices between the REC and partner institutions for future collaborations. ■

Radoje Lausevic



FULL OF OPTIMISM: SEARCH II is delivering all of its promised outcomes, and on schedule. Photo: iStock

Positive reception, positive results

Good organisation and timely delivery are crucial if a project is to be implemented successfully. Since kicking off in February 2011, the SEARCH II project has proceeded on schedule.

With the end of the SEARCH II implementation phase in sight, closing activities are now being initialised. Still, the project has delivered numerous outcomes to date. After having finalised major preparatory activities, such as the development of questionnaires and manuals, project materials were delivered to focal points so that selected schools in participating countries could begin their field activities.

This activity took place in winter 2011–2012, and data were collected via questionnaires, validated and then stored in databases ready for interpretation. In taking this approach, all four project components were covered.

Three big project meetings were organised for participants from all project countries: the launch event, an environment and health training seminar, and an energy and comfort meeting. In the field of communication, a project website was developed, and two newsletters were released and circulated to numerous stakeholders.

What remains is to prepare final outcomes for the international closing event. Efforts will also be made during this period to strengthen outreach and enhance project visibility. The common understanding is to create positive perceptions, which are needed for achieving positive results in environmental health. Given what SEARCH II has been able to achieve, nothing should stand in the way of future aspirations. ■

Anita Kocic

at a glance

37

months of project implementation

5

months of project field activity

10

months of project analysis

Italy: Partners from the start

The key promoters of the SEARCH project are the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea (IMELS) and the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC). The SEARCH I project in Italy involved approximately 1,100 students (10-12 years old) from 13 schools (55 classrooms) in which 750 spirometry tests were performed.

Results of the project were disseminated during a national workshop (Rome, November 2010) in order to encourage discussion and

exchange of information between stakeholders that would result in finding ways to ensure good-quality air in our schools. A publication documenting project results was disseminated during both the Rome workshop and the Parma Environment and Health Ministerial Conference (March 2010), and was also distributed to schools involved in the project. Members of the public, local authorities and relevant environment, health and education institutions have embraced the project approach and provided a great deal of positive feedback.

SEARCH I was a very good experience, and important steps forward have been made with the project's second phase, SEARCH II. The

latter phase has placed a special dual focus on energy use in schools and student well-being in the classroom. Fourteen schools have been involved, and interviews conducted with approximately 660 students.

A national coordination team was assembled for project implementation, which comprised IMELS, the National Institute for Environmental Protection (which handled coordination), various experts from the Catholic University of Rome, and an independent expert on energy.

Local authorities were also involved due to the fact that some technical information on schools is municipal property. Despite the willingness of local authorities to collaborate, a lack of organisation and human resources and assorted logistical problems often made it difficult to obtain the data and information needed.

With regard to disseminating information, awareness-raising activities and the promotion of best practices, it has been our intention to continue with what worked so well during SEARCH I. Not only are we preparing a dedicated publication and organising a targeted event (a national workshop or conference), we expect to enlist local help in organising a series of presentations of project results for interested schools and local authorities. ■

Elisabetta Colaiacomo



BUILDING ON THE PAST: Prior experience has helped Italy with SEARCH II implementation. Photo: iStock

spotlight

Arezzo forum draws high-level representatives from throughout Europe

"Research and advanced technologies for environment and health: New drivers for development" was the slogan of the First Forum on Development, Environment and Health, an event held in November 2012 in Arezzo, Italy, and promoted by the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea (IMELS). The forum offered the first opportunity for institutions, local authorities, the private sector, NGOs and health and environment experts to exchange knowledge and experiences at national level.

An evidence-based discussion titled "Outdoor and indoor air pollution and health: Considerations for risk management" took place during the forum. This session provided an opportunity for the IMELS representative to share the Italian experience of SEARCH project implementation and to provoke dialogue.

The Arezzo forum also hosted the High-Level Conference on Water, Climate and Health, organised by IMELS and the REC, at which participants explored critical environmental factors for human health, risk assessment challenges, main policy tools and possible joint actions. Participants included high-level representatives from South East Europe, the Mediterranean region, Central Asia and numerous international organisations. ■

Elisabetta Colaiacomo



ANOTHER LEVEL: The First Forum on Development, Environment and Health took place in Arezzo, Italy. Photo: IMELS project team





HELPING TO LEAD THE WAY: Hungarian and Italian experts analysed project data from 10 participating countries. Photo: iStock

Hungary: Expert assistance

Hungary has played a key role in the SEARCH II project at both a national and international level. The project, which started in 2010, covers the areas of health and environment and primarily involves the assessment of energy consumption in school buildings. To this end, several Hungarian and Italian experts are coordinating energy and health-comfort assessments in 10 countries.

Hungarian field activities were implemented from November 2011 to March 2012 in eight primary schools in four different cities (Budapest, Debrecen, Miskolc and Pecs). Measurement activities were accomplished smoothly due to the fact that the Hungarian schools and their contacts were already familiar with the SEARCH I programme, having already participated in the project. Personal meetings and regular communication have contributed to the high level of cooperation with schools in carrying out field activities, and have also created a positive attitude resulting in active contributions from school staff members and children.

Reka Prokai, national coordinator of the SEARCH II project in Hungary, presented the project in each school, together with a national energy expert, to explain the importance of indoor air quality, energy efficiency and health measurements during daily lessons. The children were interested and raised several questions regarding the measurements. The eight Hungarian schools provided data and other information concerning levels of student comfort and school energy consumption, which were then analysed and incorporated into all data that the Hungarian and Italian experts have gathered from the 10 participating countries. This is one of the great challenges of the project.

The Hungarian school principals have welcomed this new project initiative, and will be pleased to obtain the results of the assessment, as well as practical information on how to improve energy efficiency and indoor air quality in their schools in line with policy recommendations. Providing feedback to schools is an essential component of project effectiveness, as is awareness raising among school staff and children. Such efforts help to transform research results and recommendations into practice. Feedback from school contacts indicates that SEARCH is teaching some valuable lessons, such as the need to have proper ventilation to ensure better indoor air quality. School staff members continue to look forward to other energy efficiency-related recommendations as well. ■

Eva Csobod

expert view

Health and environment

The REC's Health and Environment Topic Area was born in 2003 with the SEARCH pilot project. The project was designed to provide evidence of the need for improved indoor air quality in schools throughout the CEE region. I designed the pilot project with Italian and Hungarian experts, and later developed the SEARCH I and SEARCH II projects from the REC.



The current project has two components. The first is to deliver environmental and health monitoring tools from SEARCH I to some Eastern European countries. The second focuses on the relationship between energy use and health and comfort levels of school children. More than one-third of European children suffer from respiratory problems, and the SEARCH initiative has the potential to cut this figure to 20 percent. ■

Eva Csobod

New experiences

Contacting and visiting schools and working with 11- and 12-year-old students have been new experiences for me. Students, teachers and administrators all participated quite enthusiastically in the SEARCH II project. Most interesting for me were the student reactions. They showed such great interest in the project and were curious about the instruments we used. They were also excited about taking part in a genuine international study.



Based on my positive experiences in Italy and the great feedback that has come from other participating countries, IMELS and the REC agree that all the schools that took part in the SEARCH II project deserve a genuine certificate of appreciation in recognition of their participation. ■

Elisabetta Colaiacomo

EC declares 2013 'Year of Air'

The European Commission, having declared 2013 the "Year of Air", will bring forth new proposals for improving air quality across Europe. The overall plan is to highlight the importance of clean air for all and to focus on actions to improve air quality across the EU. In doing so, the EC is teaming up with the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe, and various experts are reviewing the latest health science on major air pollutants such as particulate matter, ground-level ozone

IN THE MIX: Wind and solar are clear alternatives.
Photo: iStock



and nitrogen dioxide. Because of air pollution levels of recent decades, there are twice as many asthma sufferers today compared to 30 years ago.

The EC has also asked EU citizens what they would do to improve air quality in Europe. People were invited to share their views by the beginning of March 2013 on ways to ensure the full implementation of the existing framework, to improve it, and to complement it with supporting actions. Results from the public consultation will be integrated into a comprehensive review of European air policies, due in 2013.

The REC has implemented several indoor and outdoor air-quality projects over the past decade, and is in a position to provide an important voice in current policy debates.

For more information:
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/> ■



ON TAP: Geneva will host a March workshop. Photo: iStock

Partners to decide water & health agenda

The UNECE has circulated a questionnaire inviting countries and partners to indicate priorities and propose specific activities that they would like to undertake over the next three years as part of its Water and Health Protocol. Collected feedback will help programme organisers to streamline activities in light of new regional and global developments, and also provide an opportunity to mobilise resources for a strategic workshop to be held in Geneva in March 2013. ■

HealthVent presents ventilation guidelines

As a year in which the EU is expected to revise its ambient air legislation, 2013 is an auspicious time for stressing the importance of indoor air quality (IAQ) and placing it at the heart of energy efficiency strategy. In 2010, the "Health-Based Ventilation Guidelines for Europe" (HealthVent) project got under way with the objective of developing health-based ventilation guidelines for non-industrial buildings in Europe while taking energy efficiency into consideration. Europeans

spend most of their time indoors, and poor IAQ is responsible each year for 2 million disability-adjusted life-years throughout the EU27.

The HealthVent consortium held an event at the European Parliament in Brussels on February 20, 2013, to present its health-based ventilation guidelines and to describe their impact on ambient air and IAQ policies, as well as energy policies. For more information: www.healthvent.eu ■

calendar

- ▶ **June 5, 2013**
World Environment Day /
IAMP and FEAM joint workshop:
"Integrated Education in One Health",
Budapest, Hungary
- ▶ **June 6, 2013 (pending confirmation)**
SEARCH II project closing event /
"Clean Air and Healthy Environment
for Children: European actions —
SEARCH II and SINPHONIE",
Brussels, Belgium



The SEARCH II project is a continuation of the **School Environment and Respiratory Health of Children** initiative that was first launched in 2006. The research project is implemented within the international frameworks of the EU Action Plan on Environment and Health and the World Health Organization's Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe. This first issue of the project newsletter *Aspire!* focuses on field studies in Albania and Central Asia, which include indoor air quality monitoring and health testing in schools. It also introduces new project partners, shares the insights of participating experts, and outlines project-related European news.

Newsletter of the SEARCH II project

EDITORS: Anita Kocic (REC)

CONTRIBUTORS: Elisabetta Colaiacomo (Country Focus, Expert View, Spotlight), Eva Csobod (Country Focus, Expert View, European News), Anita Kocic (Looking Ahead), Radoje Lausevic (Editorial), Reka Prokai (Country Focus)

DESIGN AND LAYOUT:

Tricia Barna, Juan Torneros (REC)

COPYEDITING AND PROOFREADING

Rachel Hideg, Nathan Johnson (REC)

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