

**Utrecht: a living
lab for healthy
urban living
in Europe**



Utrecht's ambition



The Province of Utrecht is realising its ambition to become a 'living lab' for healthy urban living. In doing so, the region contributes to the long-term health and sustainability objectives for 2050 as defined in the EU Green Deal.

We find inspiration by investigating the 'blue zones', regions of the world where inhabitants have been proven to live longer, healthier and happier lives. We have developed an approach whereby we scale up innovative practical examples from Utrecht, enabling them to be rolled out to other, similar regions in Europe.

The Province of Utrecht in a nutshell

Utrecht is an attractive region, with a beautiful and varied landscape, a great diversity of appealing cities, towns and villages, and a lot of cultural heritage. The region is also home to a well-educated population, and is characterised by a high level of competitiveness and a knowledge-intensive service economy. Many people are drawn to the region to live, work and relax. This puts pressure on the space available and creates challenges for healthy urban living. From a European perspective, Utrecht

is a relatively small region, with 1.3 million inhabitants. But it is growing fast. By 2040, it will be home to 1.7 million people. This means there is an urgent need for innovations that work well in practice, and which will also benefit Europe as a whole. For example, the Utrecht energy innovation project Lomboxnet, which started as a small local project for 20 households in a street in the city of Utrecht, has now reached European scale, in part thanks to EU funding.

The Utrecht 'habitat' for scaling up

Academic research into transitions has shown that practical health and sustainability experiments carried out locally or regionally offer great opportunities for scaling up. By analogy with the concept of the 'regional innovation ecosystem', Utrecht University has developed the 'habitat' concept, which describes the contextual factors that enhance the potential for scaling up.

The Province of Utrecht has a good habitat for scaling up. A promising vision of the future has been developed with the aim of becoming the healthiest and happiest region in Europe by 2050. Health is a central theme in the provincial spatial planning vision and is directly linked to sustainability. Innovations are further developed and scaled up in regional networks, such as the Data and Knowledge Hub Healthy Urban Living and Health Hub Utrecht. Learning environments are being created in the region, supported by

knowledge institutions, for example by performing health impact assessments. Utrecht has a culture of openness and trust, which is important for scaling up and spreading innovations. And finally, Utrecht is a meeting point in the heart of the Netherlands, where many trade fairs, conferences and festivals are held with people meeting face-to-face; these events are still very important for the dissemination of knowledge and the scaling up of innovations, even in the digital age.

Research has also shown that scaling up to other regions is easier if those regions are economically, politically and/or culturally 'similar'. Regions similar to Utrecht are mainly located in North-West Europe, and we have already started working closely with many of these regions.

In this way, the province is profiling itself as the ideal living lab for healthy urban living in Europe.

More information?

See the QR-code for more information about the innovation program or send an email to: innovatie-glo@provincie-utrecht.nl



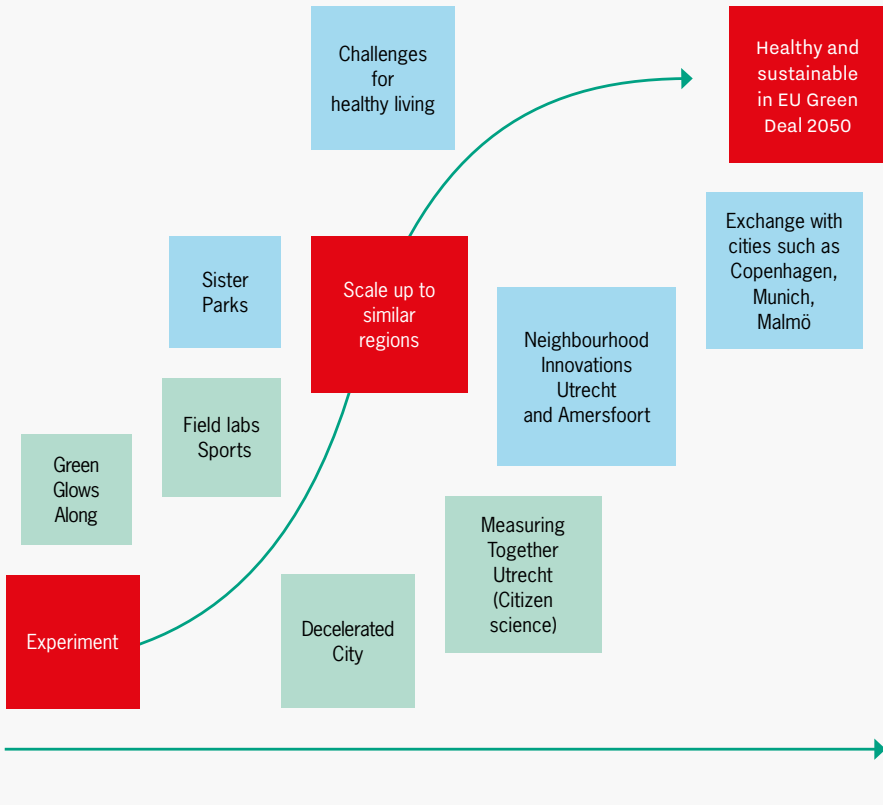
Innovation program



Partner DKH



From innovation to transition



Innovative projects in the Province of Utrecht

In the region, several innovative concepts have been developed to promote a healthy living environment. They are put into practice in various projects, which is shown in the figure above. A lot of attention

is being given to local learning processes and scaling up to new cities and regions. In this way the Utrecht region contributes to a transition to a healthier, sustainable society.



Innovative projects in the Province of Utrecht



Measuring Together Utrecht

Samen Meten Utrecht (Measuring Together Utrecht) is a community portal for residents, enabling them to measure air quality, traffic intensity, and noise in their living environment. The portal provides an overview of various measurement projects in the province.

The latest project is Clever Gardens. In this large-scale citizen science project, people with a garden collect data about heat stress and soil condition through a sensor. Based on the data, they receive advice how to reduce heat stress and increase biodiversity in their garden through specific greening interventions.

Green Grows Along

Green matters in Utrecht, as we strive for healthy growth. To achieve this, our Groen Groeit Mee (Green Grows Along) agreement ensures that when we build new homes, offices and roads, we will also take care of the green spaces nearby. In all spatial plans and regional developments, the green spaces are taken into account in a balanced way. These green spaces are crucially important when it comes to the health of residents, climate change adaptation, and biodiversity. Led by the Province of Utrecht, Green Growth is an initiative in which we are working closely with all the municipalities in the province and the four Utrecht Water Boards.



Neighbourhood Innovations in Utrecht and Amersfoort

In the two largest cities of the Province, Utrecht and Amersfoort, we show that it is possible to create large-scale healthy urban neighbourhoods. In these neighbourhoods, we encourage healthy exercise, provide spaces where people can meet, and offer healthy food options. In addition, innovative energy and circular solutions are being developed and applied in a living lab context. Feedback from residents on how the innovations are working in practice is used to improve them and scale them up.

Challenges for healthy living

Do you have a specific challenge regarding healthy living that you are struggling with and no time to set up complicated tenders? Through a new Challenge Based Innovation trajectory, we can solve such challenges in a short period of time, accelerate sustainable progress and support a new generation of entrepreneurs at the same time! The first challenges are now online: www.u-forward.nl/



Sister Parks

What if we saw our entire living environment as one big National Park? What if we take green spaces, heritage and landscape as the starting point for growth? And what if we saw our housing, mobility and economic challenges in this context? In the bottom-up Sister Parks movement, we are developing an approach with and for local initiatives in towns and cities in the Province of Utrecht, aiming to preserve and create green spaces and thus contribute to a healthier living environment. This Utrecht approach is inspired by initiatives in other regions, such as the London National Park City.



Field labs for Sports & Exercising

In a collaborative effort the province, municipalities and civil society organisations are experimenting with innovative measures to stimulate people to do more sports and exercise regularly and thus contribute to healthier life styles. Three field labs have been set up:

1. Open Sport Park Cothen: create an accessible multifunctional space for residents to use it for various functions (childcare, social meeting, etc.) in addition to playing sports as an individual or in organised forms, with shared responsibilities for maintenance and oversight;
2. Attractive outdoor space Vianen: how can a deprived residential area be made more inviting for sports and exercise and thus encourage young people in particular to adopt more active & healthier life styles?
3. Utrecht/IJsselstein sporting routes: how can existing routes to the De Nedereindse Plas recreation area be made more suitable for sporting use (cycling, running, walking) instead of arriving by car?