

Alain Dössegger^a, Oliver Studer^{a,b}, Ursula Maeder^{a,b}, Gerda Jimmy^a, Martin Rumo^a, Urs Mäder^a, Brian W. Martin^{a,c}

^a Swiss Federal Institute of Sport, Magglingen, Switzerland

^b Network HEPA Switzerland, Magglingen, Switzerland

^c Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine, University of Zurich, Switzerland

From hepa.ch to COMPI – Internet-based exchange platforms for physical activity promotion professionals in Switzerland

Abstract

Information technology can make an important contribution to the promotion of sport for all and physical activity in a number of different fields. Internet-based exchange platforms for physical activity promotion professionals are such a possibility. In Switzerland, there are currently 18 platforms, 17 of them are owned by institutions, one by a private individual. 4 of the Web sites are dealing with physical activity in a global and universal sense, 6 with either physical education or organised sports. Another 8 Web sites cover different dimensions of prevention or health promotion including physical activity. Information technology can greatly facilitate the transport of information. However, it cannot replace personal interaction. Therefore, most of the Web sites for physical activity promotion professionals provide interactive elements such as online fora, opportunities to request individual support and registrations for real-life meetings and events.

Zusammenfassung

Informatik kann einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Förderung von Bewegung und Breitensport in einer ganzen Reihe von verschiedenen Gebieten liefern. Dazu gehören auch Internet-basierte Austauschplattformen für Bewegungsförderungsfachpersonen. In der Schweiz gibt es momentan 18 solche Plattformen. 17 davon werden von Institutionen betrieben, eine von einer Privatperson. 4 der Websites beschäftigen sich mit Bewegung in einem umfassenden Sinn, 6 mit Sportunterricht in der Schule oder organisiertem Sport. Weitere 8 Websites decken verschiedene Dimensionen der Gesundheitsförderung ab, eine davon ist die Bewegungsförderung. Informatik kann die Verteilung von Informationen stark vereinfachen, sie kann aber den persönlichen Austausch nicht ersetzen. Deshalb haben die meisten Plattformen für Bewegungsförderungsfachleute interaktive Elemente wie Online-Foren, Möglichkeiten zur Anforderung individueller Unterstützung sowie Anmeldeöglichkeiten für Treffen und Anlässe in der realen Welt.

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The role of information technology in promoting physical activity

Physical activity and sport for all are becoming more and more important issues in the field of public health and there is growing interest in the promotion of physical activity. Information technology can make an important contribution to the promotion of sport for all and physical activity and the following fields with a particular potential can be identified (Martin, in press): individual motivation and support for becoming and remaining physically active; facilitated access to offers and facilities; exercise-generating video games; support for sport and physical activity providers and professionals.

Web sites promoting physical activity in the general public exist for both adults (Thüring et al., 2009) and children (Padlina et al., 2009) and can act by improving individual motivation and providing individual support. Others exist that address specifically parents such as www.kids.on.playgrounds or www.vcs-be.ch on the walking bus or Pedibus.

Internet-based exchange platforms for physical activity promotion professionals, however, give support not directly to the general public, but to those working with them. The physical activity workforce development plan of NHS Scotland (2005) distinguishes three groups of such physical activity promotion professionals. Group 1 are those who promote activity as a core part of their work,

so in Switzerland for example physical education teachers, fitness instructors, instructors of Youth+Sport or other programmes, sport officials and coordinators, and also physicians and researchers with a specific interest in physical activity and sport. Group 2 encompasses all professionals for whom physical activity promotion forms a key part of their work but is not their main focus, for example teachers, childcare providers, prevention and rehabilitation specialists and infrastructure administrators in cities and municipalities, and most health promotion professionals. Group 3 consists of all those who can play a supporting role in the promotion of physical activity; among others these are the media, city planners, transport planners, employers and politicians.

The purpose of this article is to give an overview of existing Internet-based exchange platforms for physical activity professionals in Switzerland with a short description of their background, their target audience, their structural content and their possibilities for interaction.

What are the platforms in Switzerland?

At the global level, the World Health Organisation WHO has a number of resources on physical activity and health and provides them on its Web site www.who.int. Agita Mundo (www.who.int)

URL	Short description	Institutions	Languages				Structural content						Interaction			
			German	French	Italian	English	News	Presentation of Institutions	Evidence background	Events and courses	Description of interventions and programmes	Tools for interventions and programmes	Newsletter subscription	Onlinefora	Request for support	Registration for real-life meetings and events
Platforms on global physical activity																
www.hepa.ch	Network health-enhancing physical activity HEPA Switzerland with more than one hundred member organisations	Federal Office of Sport; partners Federal Office of Public Health, Foundation Health Promotion Switzerland, Swiss Council for Accident Prevention (bfu) and other members	x	x	x		x	x	x	x				x		x
www.sportnetz.ch	Support for communities and regions in creating local sport and physical activity networks	Federal Office of Sport	x	x	x		x		x	x			x	x		
www.children-on-the-move.ch	Project inventory for physical activity promotion in children and adolescents	Federal Office of Sport, partners Institute of Exercise and Health Sciences, University of Basel, Foundation Health Promotion Switzerland and hepa.ch	x	x		(x)	x	x	x		x	x		x	(x)	
www.ratzurtat.ch	Online curriculum and guided counselling tool for physical activity counsellors	Federal Office of Sport; Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine of the University of Zurich	x						x				x			x
Platforms on specific aspects of physical activity																
www.jugendundsport.ch	Web site of the national programme Youth+Sport	Federal Office of Sport	x	x	x		x			x			x			x
www.sportunterricht.ch	Private Web site with planning resources for PE teachers	Marcel Cavelti	x				x						x	x		
http://sportnetzwerk.ch	Job exchange Web site for PE teachers and physical activity professionals	Sportnetzwerk GmbH; partners from private industry	x					x						x		
www.qims.ch	Quality tools for PE teachers and schools	Federal Office of Sport	x	x			x	x		x			x			
www.coolandclean.ch	Swiss prevention programme in youth sport covering fair-play, doping, smoking, cannabis and alcohol	Swiss Olympic Association; partners Federal Office of Sport and Federal Office of Health	x	x	x	x	x			x			x		x	
www.sportaemter.ch	Umbrella organization of local sport offices and institutions in charge of running sport infrastructure	Coalition of Swiss Sport Offices	x	x			x			x				x		x
Multidimensional platforms																
www.suissebalance.ch	National programme Suissebalance for the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity	Suissebalance; partners Federal Office of Public Health and Foundation Health Promotion Switzerland	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x			x	
www.feelok.ch	Prevention programme for adolescents, covering 10 health topics. With resources for school teachers	Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine at the University of Zurich; other partners, including Federal Office of Sport for the sport programme	x					x	x		x	x	x	x		
www.gesundheitsfoerderung.ch	Information for health promotion for the public and for health promotion professionals	Foundation Health Promotion Switzerland	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
www.quint-essenz.ch	Quality development in prevention and health promotion	Foundation Health Promotion Switzerland	x	x	x	x		x	x				x		x	x
www.radix.ch	Web site for health professionals	Foundation RADIX	x	x		(x)		x	x			x		x		x
www.gesunde-schulen.ch	Swiss network of health-promoting schools	RADIX; partners Foundation Health Promotion Switzerland and network Education and Health Switzerland	x	x				x		x	x	x	x			x
www.bildungundgesundheit.ch	Web site of the Network Education and Health Switzerland	Swiss network of health-promoting schools; partners Federal Office of Public Health and others	x	x				x	x	x		x		x		
www.kig-adipositas.net	Obesity competence center EUREGIO for professionals working with obese children and adolescents	Bureau Euregio Adipositas; Swiss, German and Austrian partners around Lake Constance; supported by EU and Swiss government	x					x		x	x	x	x			x

Table 1: Internet-based platforms for physical activity promotion professionals

agitamundo.org) and the Global Alliance on Physical Activity GAPA (www.globalpa.org.uk) are two international organisations specifically dedicated to this field, the International Society on Physical Activity and Health ISPAH is a new important player (www.ispah.org). HEPA Europe is the European network for the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity (www.euro.who.int/hepa), similar networks exist also in the Americas and in the Asia Pacific region (Martin et al., in press).

In Switzerland, we are currently aware of 18 Internet-based platforms for physical activity promotion professionals (table 1). 17 of them are owned by institutions, only www.sportunterricht.ch providing support to physical education teachers is run by a private individual person. 4 of the Web sites are dealing with physical activity in a global and universal sense, 6 with a specific aspect of it, either physical education or organised sports. Another 8 Web sites cover different dimensions of prevention or health promotion and have physical activity as one but not as their only topic.

The platforms offer different elements to their users. 13 out of the 18 provide news about ongoing activities and developments, 11 supply information about the institutions behind the platforms, their partners and members. On 10 of the Web sites, evidence background information is available, for example on health effects of physical activity, on levels of inactivity or on effectiveness of interventions. 9 platforms present links to their own events and courses or to those of partner institutions. 13 of them also develop and share tools for interventions and programmes, for example supporting project and funding applications, implementation, evaluation or teaching.

8 of the platforms provide descriptions of interventions and programmes in the form of factsheets, contact information or more complex inventory databases. While most of these sites present projects that are either supported by the respective organisations or with which collaboration has been established, only "Children on the Move – a Project Inventory COMPI" (www.children-on-the-move.ch) tries to give a complete overview of projects in this age group by inviting all actors to have their interventions registered.

Exchange elements in Swiss physical activity promotion platforms

All the elements mentioned above can be very useful in the promotion of physical activity. By communicating experiences and activities from partner institutions, they can to some extent also represent an exchange of ideas. However, they are not necessarily really interactive.

The subscription to a newsletter can be considered a first step in this direction, as it requires the user to actively register his e-mail address. 8 of the 18 platforms are offering this opportunity. 14 of the Web sites possess truly interactive elements, such as online fora, opportunities to request individual support, and registrations for real-life meetings and events. Online fora are internet discussion sites usually open only to registered users. Comments and questions can be posted and reactions and answers can be provided by experts running the platform or by other registered members. Some platforms offer the opportunity to post requests for support in preparing or implementing interventions. The actual support can then be given on the platform or through personal contact. Two platforms offer financial support to a limited number of projects.

The best possibility for bridging the gap between virtual and real-life platforms is certainly the registration for real-life conferences, workshops or also training courses.

The role of exchange platforms

Information technology is already well established in research and development, in technical training, in membership management for clubs, and in promoting events and providing access to results. In the support for sport and physical activity providers and professionals, traditional tools can be partially or entirely replaced by faster and potentially cheaper Internet-based elements.

This process has already taken place in Switzerland, as the 18 Internet-based platforms for physical activity promotion professionals described in this review show. A more systematic search may allow to identify even more local and national platforms, particularly in related fields such as transport or town planning.

The structural content elements of the platforms are described, but a more thorough analysis of their content will be needed to assess their quality and also gaps and overlap between the offers. As quality of offers on the Internet is often difficult to judge and as better readability does not necessarily correspond with better quality of content (Sutherland et al., 2005), the best general recommendation is to rely less on design and more on the trustworthiness of the institutions behind the offer.

Information technology can greatly facilitate the transport of information. However, it cannot replace personal interaction. Therefore, most of the Web sites for physical activity promotion professionals provide interactive elements such as online fora, opportunities to request individual support and registrations for real-life meetings and events.

Address for correspondence:

Alain Dössegger, Swiss Federal Institute of Sport, 2532 Magglingen (Switzerland) (E-mail: alain.doessegger@baspo.admin.ch)

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