



Amsterdam Public Health

HBCD TRAVEL GRANT 2022

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PLACE: ZARAGOZA, SPAIN

PERIOD: 4 NOV '22 – 6 FEB '23

Department: Public and Occupational Health
Section: Child and Adolescent Public health research and
Innovation (CAPRI)

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FUN FACTS ABOUT ZARAGOZA

- In Zaragoza, there is a lot of wind. They even have a special name for the strong wind: Cierzo.
- As Zaragoza is very close to the Spanish Pyrenees, in the winter period the city is much colder than you would expect. The summers on the other hand are extremely hot (with temperatures between 40 and 50 degrees Celsius).
- The city has around 700.000 inhabitants, which is comparable to Rotterdam.
- Zaragoza is very well located in Spain, as it is only 1.5 hour by train to Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao and San Sebastian (or 1.5 hour by car to the Spanish Pyrenees!).
- Zaragoza has a big river flowing through the city called Ebro, and a beautiful basilica on the main square in the old city center.
- Not so many people speak English in Zaragoza, which is very helpful if you are trying to learn the Spanish language.

THE RESEARCH VISIT



Laura and Pilar

The work as part of the research visit was an addition to an existing European project 'GrowH! Growing up Healthy!' [growh.eu], which aims to promote healthy behaviors (i.e. healthy diet, physical activity, and sleep) among children aged 9 to 12 years old. The approach "Kids in Aktie" (developed in Amsterdam) combines participatory action research with Intervention Mapping. This approach was adapted to state-of-the-art methods and approaches, and the local context of Zaragoza. The adapted approach "Chic@s en Acción" is being implemented in Zaragoza and evaluated for feasibility. This was led by a postdoctoral researcher in Zaragoza: Pilar De Miguel-Etayo.

OUTCOMES OF THE VISIT

Childhood obesity is a complex problem, which has shown to be hard to tackle with health promoting interventions. There is a need for novel approaches for childhood obesity prevention, such as a novel participatory action research approach that includes elements of systems thinking. The GENUUD group started with implementing such an approach in a deprived neighborhood in Zaragoza, which is supported by the guidance of our team at Amsterdam UMC. The research visit as part of this grant has reached several outcomes.

First of all, my participation in facilitating the participatory action team meetings with children at two primary schools in Zaragoza led to close observation of the participatory action research process. This allowed me to reflect on the research process and the adaptations that are important when transferring this approach to another context. Furthermore, it made it possible to tailor my advice during implementation to the current needs of the action teams. A second outcome of being in Zaragoza was that it made it possible to support the mapping of relevant stakeholders in Zaragoza and compare these to the context in Amsterdam, to get insight in the differences and similarities between the two contexts. A third outcome of working together at one location was that we were more efficient in the development of a logic model of the participatory approach in Zaragoza. A fourth outcome was that we kick started in writing the first scientific research paper together as part of the collaboration between the teams in Zaragoza and Amsterdam: how to adapt a participatory action research approach to a different context. Lastly, the research visit boosted my academic and professional development, by sharing knowledge and skills, creating opportunities for future collaborations, and learning a new language.

Within HBCD, there is a special interest group on Participatory Health Research. This year (2023), I will organize a workshop as part of this HBCD special interest group, transferring the lessons learned from my visit to other HBCD and potentially other APH researchers. If you are interested in participatory research and you would like to join this interest group, you can contact me.

PLACEMENT

The University of Zaragoza (in Spanish: ‘Universidad de Zaragoza’) is a public university in Zaragoza, in the region Aragón, Spain. This is one of the oldest universities in Spain, with a record of academic achievements, such as high-impact publications, European grants, and the university excels in its teaching activities. Professor Luis A. Moreno Aznar, ‘Professor of Research Methods’, is head of the research group ‘Growth, Exercise, NUtrition and Development (GENUD)’ at the University of Zaragoza.



Basilica de Nuestra Señora del Pilar

The GENUD research group has shown a great interest in the study of lifestyle along with growth and development in children and adolescents. Their research mainly focuses on nutrition and physical activity, but also on sleep, sedentary behavior, and socioeconomic factors associated with these behaviors. Also, the group is part of the program ‘Combating obesity: strategies for prevention and intervention’ of the ‘Erasmus Intensive Program’. With their work, they have greatly contributed to the research on the prevention of childhood overweight and obesity. Their work is in line with the mission and goals of HBCD, as they also focus on the prevention of chronic diseases by promoting healthy lifestyle behaviors. Especially by focusing on promoting youth’s health, so that children and adolescents will grow up as healthy adults.



Part of the GENUD Research group



Organization of a workshop for GENUD colleagues
with home-made Spanish food

MANY THANKS

I would like to thank APH HBCD for granting this award. This research visit has contributed to my personal and professional development, as well as to the quality of the research work as part of the GrowH! project.