

Results of a literature search and in-depth interviews with regional health policy experts

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Introduction

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- **Regional health policy** continues to move into the focus.
- **Challenges**
 - demographic change
 - technological progress in medicine
 - increased discussionen about funding
- **Target group- and region-specific ways** are necessary for public health interventions

Project background

WHO/Europe Regions for Health Network (RHN)

LIGA.NRW - WHO Collaborating Center for Regional Health Policy and Public Health

- support, promote, evaluate and encourage further work on regional health policies
- carry out activities related to the development of health policies and strategies in accordance with the **"Health for All"-principles**

Thrust of the RHN project

- Structuring and further developing of regional health policy
- focussing on decentralisation, innovation management and performance assessment



Aim of the project

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Following the “Health for All” strategy (WHO).....

to set up a literature database on regional health policy topics to detect current health system-related trends and factors

to contribute data on health policy development at the regional level within Europe

to collect and disseminate expertise and experience with planned or already implemented measures in regional health policy

to encourage political decision-making using experience gained in other regions across Europe

to improve and increase the transfer of knowledge and experience of health policy development amongst RHN-member countries (networking)

to search for conceptual frameworks and performance indicators to achieve effectiveness, equity, efficiency and quality of health systems



Methods:

Research strategy searching literature

Interviews with experts

Methods: Search strategy

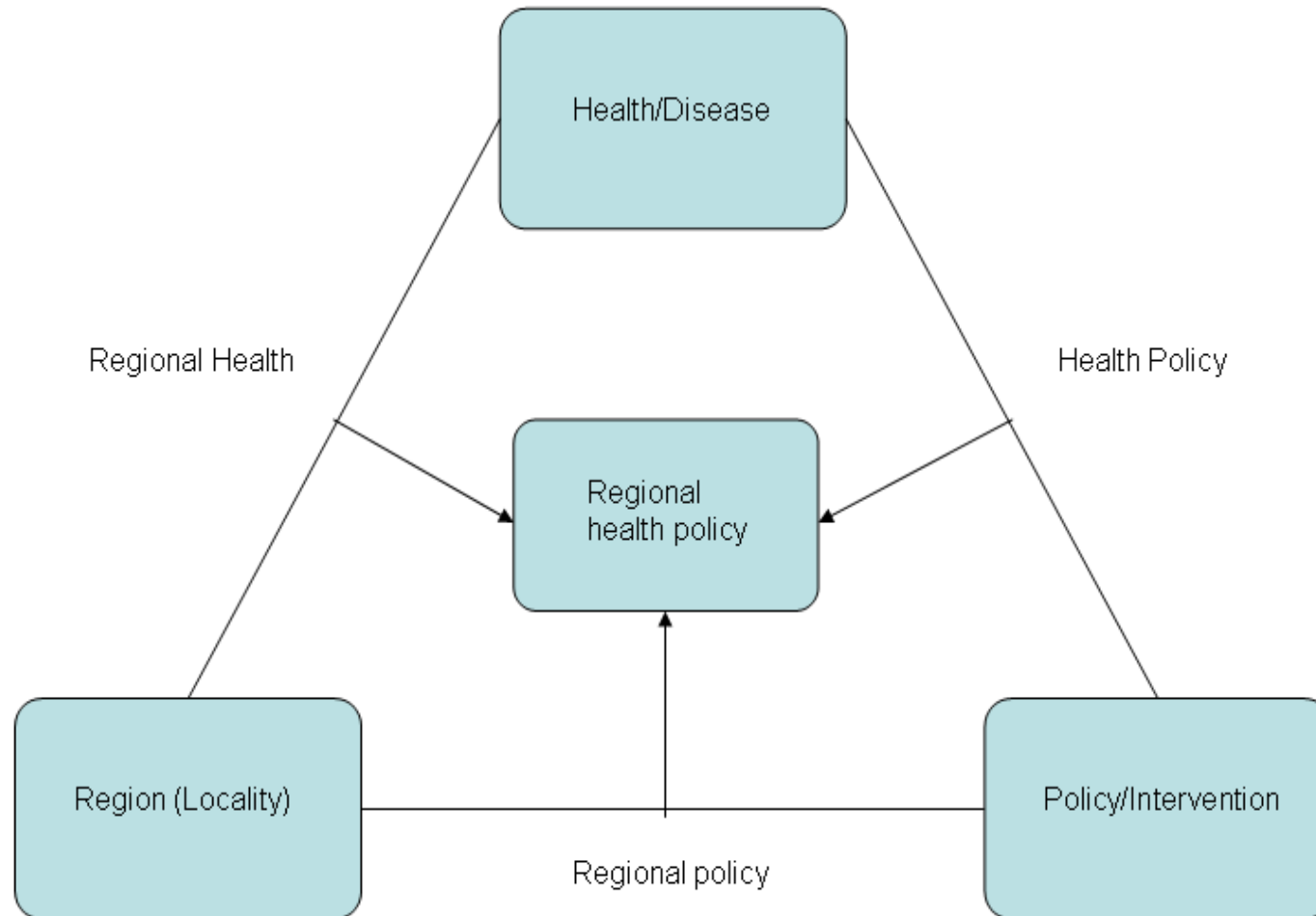


Figure 1: The subtopics of regional health policy (Source: LIGA.NRW)

Methods: Search strategy

Topics of the literature search

Papers were included which

- deal with political strategies and developing strategies in the context of public health
- focus on the subnational (regional) level in the sense of regional health policy and regional health strategies.

Expanding the search by including the topics of

- Decentralization in European health systems
- Regional development/implementation of decentralisation concepts -
Performance assessment in regional health care

Methods: Research strategy

Search terms used and how they were extended/specified

Starting terms	Extensions/Specifications
regional	-local -community
health	-welfare -care
policy	-planning -system -model -making -governance
decentralisation	- devolution

The terms were used in various combinations with each other.

Method: Research strategy

Overview of the online databases used

Database	Access
Pubmed	free
WHO Library Information System	free
HECLINET	free
HealthStar	restricted
Social Citation Index Expanded	restricted

Methods: Research strategy

The hits were narrowed down into into three nested lists

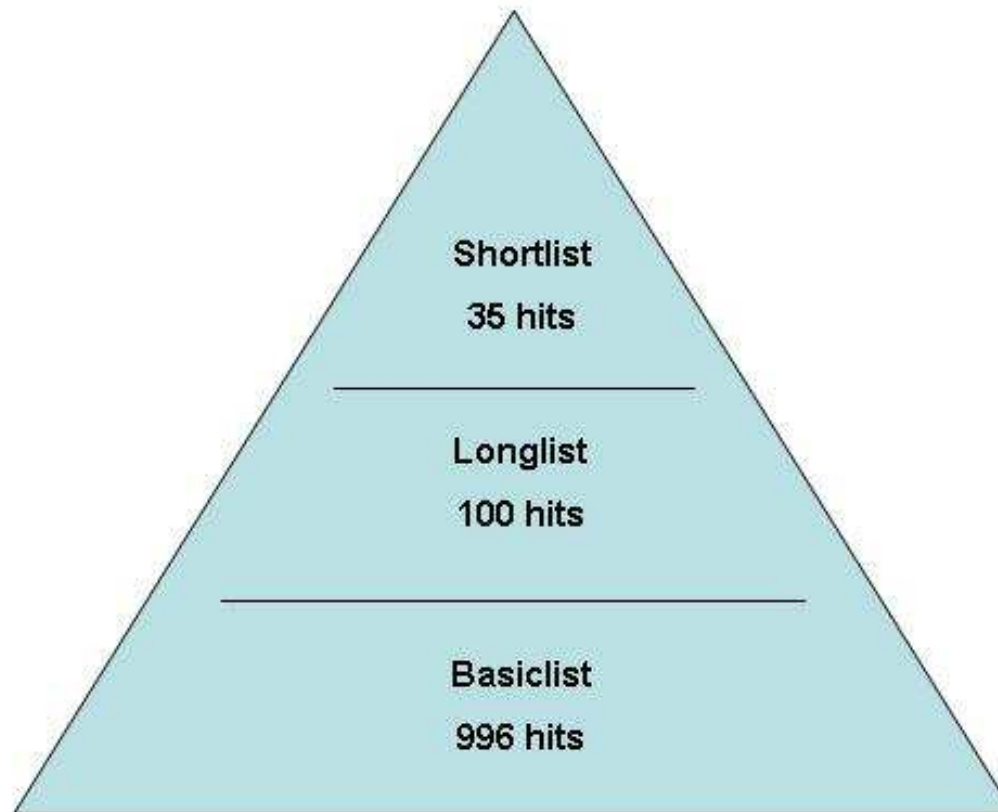


Figure 2: Ranking of the literature search results

Methods: Research strategy

Criteria for selecting the papers

- relevance of the topic
- up-to-dateness
- relevance for the European region
- access to the literature (free/restricted)
- practical relevance for the target groups

Methods: Interviews with experts

- National and international experts were consulted who deal directly with public health and health care issues at the regional levels
- Interviews were conducted with a guideline comprising the following themes:
 - structures in regional health policy
 - Communication- and information-related need for action within the RHN
 - regional health policy vs. National/ European health policy
 - problems in regional health policy in the context of the global economic crisis



Results of literature research

Results of literature research(1)

Topic: Regional health strategy and targets

- Wismar et al. (2008): Health Targets in Europe – Learning from experience

Health targets are instruments for improving public health systems. A critical discussion is given of factors which may either help or hinder these goals.

- Rechel et al. (2009): Investing in hospitals of the future

Using the case of hospital planning, the authors show how planning of investments into public health facilities requires particularly careful strategic deliberations regarding funding and management during a recession.

Results of literature research (2)

Topic: Regional development and implementation of decentralisation concepts

- Saltman et al. (2007): Decentralization in health care – strategies and outcomes

Introduces the reader to decentralisation of public health systems by means of examples.

- Bohigas (2008): Comment on decentralization, re-centralization and future health policy

Discusses the possible consequences of decentralisation and gives different perspectives of the issue.

Results of literature research(3)

Topic: Performance assessment in regional public health

Spencer & Walshe (2008): National quality improvement policies and strategies in European healthcare systems

An analysis of health policy strategies and approaches to implementation in Europe: Effectiveness and applicability to other public health systems.

Results of the literature (4)

.... an outlook

The papers assessed

- provide fundamental information on how to deal with problems in regional health policy.
- help find scientific answers to region-specific issues/developments and to examine planned approaches as well as successfully implemented strategies.
- help standardise information amongst the RHN member countries and provide a uniform information basis
- give the option of linking up with online information providers and communications services within the RHN

Goal: progressively build a comprehensive scientific database for regional health policy activities



Results of the expert interviews

Results of the expert interviews (1)

Opportunities for RHP to address human health in their „everyday“ living - environments

- Spatial and target group-specific public health interventions to local problems
 - can promote and increase positive changes in health related working and living conditions (particularly for vulnerable groups)

Results of the expert interviews (2)

Interdisciplinary work

- Local authority colleagues from different departments, such as public health, social work, education, environmental policy, engineering etc. should cooperate closely together
- Ensure a consistent dialogue and a more consistent level of engagement

Health promotion, disease prevention and health care must be integral parts of different fields in politics

Results of the expert interviews (3)

Risks and opportunities of RHP against the backdrop of an increasingly European public health system

- Changing role of RHP in the context of EU policy
 - European integration process poses a challenge for European health and social systems
- National public health systems are faced with a number of challenges
 - Diseases and health risks know no borders
 - Transnational use of health services
- Differences in competence and capacity in the European Union member states constitute a significant hindrance for transnational exchange
- It is difficult bringing together the wide range of actors that have an impact on health



Summary

Summary

While the increased demand for cross-border health services and the burgeoning health market can pose a threat to the autonomy of national public health systems, they also are an opportunity to achieve uniform health care standards throughout Europe.

The new media allow a greater informal information exchange and help deal effectively with public health issues and opportunities to reduce inequality and improve health and well-being.

Differences in competence and capacity at the EU, the national and the regional level often lead to obstacles in health policy cooperation.

In the context of the global economic crisis, a „Europeanisation“ of health policy goes together with potential consequences for the solidarity principle in public health.



Thank you for your attention!