

ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING INCREASED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF EMPLOYEES AS AN ELEMENT OF BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATION – A CASE STUDY

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Purpose: The objective of the argument in this paper is to present a summary of the implementation of the Free the Energy! project, the main goal of which was to promote physical activity as one of the important components of a healthy lifestyle and one of the elements of building a sustainable organization.

Design/methodology/approach: In the theoretical part of the paper, the definitions of the concept of sustainable development and sustainable organizations, as well as physical activity as one of the main components of a healthy lifestyle, are presented synthetically. The research part presents a summary of the implementation of the Free the Energy! project, the main goal of which was to promote physical activity as one of the important components of a healthy lifestyle and one of the elements of building a sustainable organization. The empirical research conducted independently by members of the research team in the form of a case study was devoted to achieving the research objectives. The following selection methods were used: document analysis (regulations, University of Lodz strategy, project reports) and semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with participants of running training carried out as part of the “Free the Energy!”

Findings: The analysis of the research results confirms the achievement of the goals of Free the Energy! project. The project activities achieved the main goals, i.e. promoting physical activity as one of the main components of a healthy lifestyle and one of the elements of building a sustainable organization. Additionally, the activities undertaken as part of the project had a positive impact on improving the image of the University of Lodz.

Social implications: Building awareness among the academic community of what sustainable development is and how to implement sustainable development goals.

Practical implications: The results of the research discussed in the paper have many practical implications, which may be an indication for other universities of what selected initiatives to undertake in the area of sustainable development.

Originality/value: The paper reveals new aspects that play a crucial role in shaping sustainable universities.

Keywords: Healthy lifestyle, promotion of physical activity, sustainable development, sustainable organizations.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Popularizing the idea of a healthy lifestyle by promoting one of its most important elements, i.e. physical activity, and the organization's activities in disseminating it in accordance with the principles of sustainable development constitute both a challenge and an opportunity for employers. Employers, through the above-mentioned activities, can shape good relationships with their employees by promoting activities to improve the quality of life in the workplace. Physical activity contributes to a higher level of personal well-being, as well as the improvement of psycho-physical health and the quality of work. In addition, there are also limitations, including costs of sickness absence, whether the level of professional satisfaction of employees increases, and at the same time, taking such actions by organizations is a way to increase the level of organizational culture and build a positive image inside and outside the organization. **This study makes an original and innovative contribution to the literature by proposing solutions that universities can implement in the area of promoting a healthy and active lifestyle among employees, as one of the important elements of implementing sustainable development. The formulated conclusions show successful solutions at the University of Lodz and how effectively this concept can be implemented into the practice of any organization.**

In the near future, an essential action in every organization will be to transform them into sustainable organizations. We should expect an increasing number of legal regulations related to sustainable development. Sustainable development for conscious organizations should be included not only in their strategy, but should also be reflected in the real actions of the employer and employees. Sustainable development goals cannot be achieved unless activities are carried out in organizations to educate employees in this area, and one of the elements of building a sustainable organization is promoting the idea of a healthy lifestyle and enabling employees to take actions consistent with this idea. Sustainable development and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle among employees are different, but complementary concepts.

In the theoretical part of the paper, the definitions of the concept of sustainable development and sustainable organizations, as well as physical activity as one of the main components of a healthy lifestyle, are presented in a synthetic way. The research part presents a summary of the implementation of the Free the Energy! project, the main goal of which was to promote physical activity as one of the important components of a healthy lifestyle and one of the elements of building a sustainable organization. The paper also highlights the significant role that activities supporting increased physical activity of employees play in building a sustainable

organization. It was also noted that implementing such activities increases the value of the organization by implementing the sustainable development in practice.

2. Sustainable Development and sustainable organizations – literature review

The concept of sustainable development gained popularity after defining the connections between economic development and the development of social relations and the environment and natural resources. These demands were reflected in the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment adopted on June 16, 1972, in which work was undertaken to define the so-called sustainable development in the political, ecological, economic, and social context (Stockholm Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment 1972).

The definition of sustainable development was developed in the report entitled: *Our Common Future – Brundtland 1987* (WCED, 1987), which has since brought the concept into the global spotlight (Imran et al., 2011). A milestone on the way to building sustainable development was the Earth Summit in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. The global agreement was signed by 179 countries. Two key documents were then created: the Rio Declaration - a document describing the general concept of sustainable development (Rio Declaration (1992), and Agenda 21 - a document presenting ways, principles, and processes of putting this ideology into practice (Agenda 21, 1992)). Agenda 21 includes a program of actions to improve the quality of human life today and for future generations. It is an action plan for sustainable global development for the 21st century, containing a set of 2500 recommendations for states, governments, intergovernmental and international organizations and societies. To make this concept more binding and applicable, it is necessary for many entities to participate at various levels of society (Baumgartner, Rauter, 2017). Sustainability should become a reality for everyone (Sachs et al., 2022).

Another important document related to sustainable development is the detailed Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 (*Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2015), which contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and 169 detailed tasks. The Agenda begins a new era in the national action and international cooperation, committing all countries to take a number of development actions. These are actions aimed at economic growth, increasing prosperity and meeting the health, educational, and social needs of people while protecting the environment. The seventeen Sustainable Development Goals are a guide and a list of things to do for the planet and people (*Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2015). From a business perspective, the ultimate impact of the SDGs is to establish ‘sustainable, innovative, and people-centric’

economies. Therefore, the mission of every organization should be to ensure that its employees are healthy and well educated, as well as to increase employee awareness of what sustainable development is and how each citizen can contribute to achieving SDG goals. This document is called “an agenda of the people by the people, and for the people – and this will ensure its success.” Therefore, the double role of the human factor is clearly indicated, both as the initiator and beneficiary of the implementation of SDG objectives. At the organizational level, the people who can contribute most to their implementation are mainly managers and personnel department employees responsible for human resources management (Chams, García-Blandón, 2019).

Today, organizations should operate in accordance with the principles of sustainable development and it should be included in their value system (Wirtenberg et al., 2007). Management staff faces a challenge to develop, in addition to economic aspects, also social and ecological aspects in the company's activities (Brinkmann, 2016; Gimenez et al., 2012). Sustainable organizations are those which resources, activities, and products are subordinated to the principles of sustainability. A fully sustainable organization conducts sustainable operations based on sustainable resources. These resources include people, infrastructure in the form of buildings and structures, its durable and nondurable equipment, including machines and devices, and all input goods. The activities of a sustainable company result in sustainable products. Organizations that operate in accordance with this concept are called sustainable enterprises. Their domain is sustainable management, an integral part of which is sustainable personnel (Pabian, 2017).

Agenda 21 also highlights the significant role of sport in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and for social progress, noting, among other things, that sport highlights the importance of health, education, and inclusive societies. The document lists the following advantages of sport: "promoting peace and tolerance, strengthening the sense of unity between people around the world, developing teamwork and competitiveness, teaching teamwork, respect for other people, and fostering the establishment of friendly relationships. Sport also fights discrimination, eliminates differences between countries, and integrates societies. Moreover, it is becoming more and more popular and mobilizes everyone, both women and men. Regular exercise is a key element of a healthy lifestyle. Sport improves concentration, teaches concentration, influences academic and work results" (Agenda 21, 1992).

3. Physical activity is one of the main components of a healthy lifestyle

Today, more and more organizations are taking action to provide their employees with the best possible working conditions by taking care of the so-called employee well-being. These types of activities have been promoted in the global economy for many years.

In 1994, the World Health Organization published the document "Global strategy on occupational health for all: The way to health at work". Already then, it was suggested to employers that they should carry out multidimensional campaigns to protect employees' health (World Health Organization, 1994).

Defining the concept of health is difficult. The difficulty in defining the essence of health is reflected in the large number of definitions of this concept. The Ottawa Charter defines health as a core value for achieving complete physical, mental, and social well-being. An individual or group must be able to recognize their expectations and needs that determine this well-being, as well as have the skills and opportunities to implement them (Charter, 1986).

According to the World Health Organization, health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. This terminology has been expanded to include the ability to lead an effective social and economic life, as well as the spiritual scope (The preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization, 1946).

The state of health depends on many factors. The concept of health areas was presented in 1974 by M. Lalonde in a publication "A New Perspective on the Health of Canadians" (Lalonde, 1974).

M. Lalonde distinguished four groups of factors affecting the health of the population: the area of biology and genetics, behavior and lifestyle, environmental (which includes economic, social, cultural and physical factors) and the area of organization of the health care system. The most responsible for our health is our lifestyle, it occupies over 50%. Then, 21% is assigned to environmental factors, followed by biological components of 16%, and healthcare, it oscillates within 10% (Hancock, 2003).

Definition of lifestyle developed by the World Health Organization underlines the importance of factors that influence lifestyle. According to it, a lifestyle is a way of living based on identifiable patterns of behavior that are determined by the interplay between personal characteristics of the individual, social interactions, and socio-economic and environmental living conditions (World Health Organization, 1998). Lifestyle is also defined as a set of everyday behaviors characteristic of a certain social community or a specific individual. It is a specific "way of being" that distinguishes a given community or individual from others (Jensen, 2007).

There are many lifestyle components. The most important lifestyle components are: practicing sports, non-professional interests; participating in sociopolitical life; social activities; care about appearance, diet (diet followed, eating habits) (Jensen, 2007; Giddens, 2012).

Lifestyle is, therefore, a fundamental issue for health and conditioning of physical well-being. Choosing the right lifestyle can be achieved when a person has the appropriate knowledge of this sphere and significance (Korporowicz, 2004).

Lifestyle has many adjective connotations that reflect modern and detailed concepts of a human lifestyle. One of them is a healthy lifestyle.

The concept of a *healthy lifestyle* occurs in various fields of science, for example, medicine, sociology, psychology, management, and quality sciences. WHO defines a healthy lifestyle as: “a way of living that reduces the risk of serious illness or premature death (...) and helps you enjoy more aspects of life. Health is not just about avoiding disease, it is also about physical, mental and social well-being” (World Health Organization 1999).

Healthy lifestyle behaviors have been consistently associated with reduced all-cause mortality, and increased lifespan and wellbeing (Larsson et al., 2017).

A healthy lifestyle is a concept relating to an individual characteristic way of being, including physical activity, an appropriate, balanced diet, and the elimination of stimulants (Korzeniowska, Puchalski, 2019; Ostaszewski, 2008).

Physical activity is one of the most important factors of a healthy lifestyle. Physical activity can be undertaken in many different ways: walking, cycling, sports and active forms of recreation (for example, dance, yoga, tai chi). Physical activity can also be undertaken at work and around the house. All forms of physical activity can provide health benefits if undertaken regularly and of sufficient duration and intensity (World Health Organization, 2019).

Regular physical activity is proven to help prevent and treat noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and breast and colon cancer. It also helps to prevent hypertension, overweight and obesity and can improve mental health, quality of life and well-being (World Health Organization, 2019). People who play sports are athletic and slim, they also have better memory and are able to focus better due to the greater amount of oxygen supplied to the brain. Regular physical activity is the most effective and the cheapest means of preventing many somatic diseases, it also has a positive effect on mental health because it copes well with fatigue and stress reduction. Activity that is properly tailored to personal needs has a positive effect on people of all ages (Haskell, 2006; Fukukawa et al., 2004).

Despite the entire range of health-promoting measures, it is the specification and development of guidelines for a healthy lifestyle that creates the greatest chances for a significant improvement in the health situation of the entire society. The experiments of countries that have successfully implemented them show significant results. The concept of implementing a healthy lifestyle as an opportunity to improve the health of the population is very desirable and beneficial (Fortunka, 2020).

In summary, health promotion means social and political activities at the individual and collective level, the aim of which is to raise awareness of health of society, disseminate a healthy lifestyle, and create conditions conducive to health. It is a process of activation that, among others, local communities, politicians, experts, professionals have undertaken to achieve lasting changes (reduction of behaviors that are risk factors and the spread of health-promoting behaviors) and the introduction of changes in the environment that reduce or eliminate the environmental causes of health threats (Jethon, Grzybowski, 2000).

The concept of health promotion at work has evolved, i.e. introducing health into the philosophy and practice of the organization, into its goals, values, promoted behavioral patterns, functioning norms, management method, company image, etc. (Korzeniowska, Puchalski, 2019).

The organizational level refers to the creation of a health-friendly culture in the workplace. Typically, these are activities included in the company's strategic documents, but they can also be grass-roots activities of employees, which constitute good practices in this area, are very popular and have been accepted by the company's managers. An example of such a solution are activities increasing the physical activity of employees at the University of Lodz through the implementation of the "Free the Energy!" project.

4. Methodology

The analysis of good practices in companies requires the use of qualitative methods that allow for in-depth knowledge on a specific topic and getting to the heart of the problem. They do not focus on the representativeness of the results, but are aimed at understanding the essence of a given phenomenon.

Therefore, empirical research conducted independently by members of the research team in the form of a case study was devoted to achieving the research objectives. The case study method was chosen based on the assumption that the role of management sciences is primarily to propose solutions to specific management problems to be applied by organizations. Therefore, case studies that present good management practices should be the basic method and main goal of management sciences (Sudoł, 2012).

The research procedure was used to determine whether the company (University of Lodz) uses effective practices to support employees to increase physical activity as one of the components of a healthy lifestyle and one of the elements to build a sustainable organization. The following selection methods were used: document analysis (regulations, University of Lodz strategy, project reports) and semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with participants of running training carried out as part of the "Free the Energy!" project in 2023.

The "Free the Energy!" project - employee initiative

For the first time in 2020, the University of Lodz announced internal recruitment for teams consisting of university employees that represented the University of Lodz in the annual Poland Business Run charity run. Interest in participating in the race exceeded the expectations of the university authorities: instead of the originally planned five teams, the University of Lodz was ultimately represented by as many as 10 teams, i.e. a total of 50 employees. Furthermore, on the initiative of employees participating in the Poland Business Run and with the support of

the university, running training sessions were organized during which employees prepared for the Lodz edition of the Poland Business Run under the supervision of a professional trainer - dr. Piotr Kędzia from the Sports Pedagogy Training Centre, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Lodz, Olympic athlete from Athens and Beijing in the 4x400 m relay. These training sessions met with great interest from employees. As a result, apart from the real benefits from running training, additional value was observed in the form of integration of the academic community (scientific and administrative staff), expansion of cooperation with the Academic Sports Association Lodz (some of the training took place at the AZS Lodz athletics stadium), as well as an increase in employees' expectations towards the organization of exactly this type of running initiatives.

The initiators and implementers of the "Free the Energy!" project there were mainly three employees of the University of Lodz representing the Science Centre, the Faculty of Educational Sciences, the Faculty of Management, who, taking part in trainings preparing for the Poland Business Run and observing the interest of the participants in these trainings, decided to find a project that would allow the continuation of this initiative. An employee from the Science Centre reviewed currently available projects that would fit into the assumptions of the training sessions. The employees wrote a project that was positively and received funding from the Program of the Minister of Science and Higher Education entitled Social Responsibility of Science to support activities promoting sports.

The project "Free the Energy!" was addressed to employees of the University of Lodz, i.e. teaching and research staff, teaching staff and administrative staff. The project was implemented from October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2022.

The project activities had two main goals: promotion of physical activity as the main component of a healthy lifestyle and one of the elements of building a sustainable organization.

Detailed goals of the project:

- promoting a healthy and active lifestyle among University of Lodz employees,
- improving the psychophysical condition of the participants.
- increased knowledge and skills of University of Lodz employees in the field of rational physical activity, correct body posture, and healthy eating habits.
- stimulating the integration of the academic community.

Program activities included running training, increasing knowledge in the field of health prevention, and organizing a university running event.

The assumption was that achieving specific project effects would be possible by popularizing running as one of the basic forms of physical activity, knowledge of corrective and therapeutic exercises to correct body posture defects, creating a healthy workplace and developing healthy eating habits. Important effects of implementing project activities also include improving general physical fitness parameters, i.e. mobility, strength, endurance, speed, power, and motor coordination.

In addition, the project activities perfectly coincided with the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the University of Lodz, which took place in 2020. A joint run of employees representing various scientific disciplines, students of various faculties, and administrative employees from various organizational units. It was one of the best forms of integration, healthy competition, and promotion of a healthy lifestyle. Moreover, it contributed to an increase in the sense of belonging to a large academic community and an increase in the employee's identification with the university.

The University of Lodz, being one of the largest employers in Lodz and the Lodz region (approx. 4,000 employees - scientists, educators and administrative staff as well as participants of doctoral schools), has been taking actions for many years to encourage employees to be more physically active and practice sports regularly. The University of Lodz's activities in this area are based both on "systemic" solutions (university-wide offer) and initiatives of individual departments. Employees of the University of Lodz have the opportunity to use funds intended for the promotion of sports and recreation from the Company's Social Benefits Fund for, among others: FitProfit cards entitling to unlimited use of sports and recreation services in facilities throughout the country, sections (sailing, cycling and hiking) organizing rallies and trips, swimming pool tickets, and other sports activities at the Centre for Physical Education and Sports of the University of Lodz. In addition, each year the youth program includes sports events. Faculty initiatives deserve special recognition, such as faculty sports picnics combined with competitions (e.g. for the Dean's Cup) or tournaments.

In the years 2016-2018, research was carried out at the University of Lodz aimed, among others, at examining the opinions of employees on the university's promotion of a healthy lifestyle: physical activity and sport (Syper-Jędrzejak, 2019). At that time, it had 442 employees, including 250 women. The results obtained confirmed the positive assessment of the university's initiatives to promote sports - up to 87.5% of responses. However, it turned out that not all employees are fully familiar with the university's sports and recreation promotion offer. The respondents had the poorest understanding of sports competitions and contests (as many as 33.5% answered "I don't know"). This was probably due to the fact that this area of the University of Lodz is dominated by local initiatives (faculty competitions, tournaments, and sports picnics), and it can be assumed that such information reaches primarily the circle of people interested in it.

In addition, some departments were less active in this area, translating into the level of knowledge and interest of the employees working there. The survey showed that the prevailing opinion among employees was that there should be more university-wide initiatives addressed to the entire academic community. Running was particularly popular among University of Lodz employees.

The implementation of the project is extremely important for the academic community of the University of Lodz (the project is an initiative of the employees of the University of Lodz and at the same time a response to the needs of the employees, which resulted from the research

conducted by M. Syper-Jędrzejak and interviews conducted with employees of the University of Lodz), but also for the authorities of the University of Lodz, because the activities promoting a healthy lifestyle among the academic community and aimed at integrating the academic community were intended to increase the attractiveness of working conditions and the level of employee satisfaction, which is particularly important in the case of the HR Excellence in Research title held by the University of Lodz. This is a prestigious distinction received by the University of Lodz in 2017 when it joined the European Commission program as part of the Research Human Resources Strategy. The logo is awarded to European institutions that provide scientists with, among others: the best possible working conditions.

The project is also in line with the Lodz goals of the University 2021-2030 Strategy. This document emphasizes that the University of Lodz is focused on achieving sustainable development goals and integrating the academic community. In the above-mentioned strategy, in achieving the goal: "Strengthening the image of the University of Lodz as a university boldly taking up the challenges of modern times" there is an important provision "University of Lodz supports activities aimed at strengthening social responsibility, shaping social sensitivity and perpetuating the ideas of sustainable development" and "the university initiates and actively participates in cultural and social activities taking place in its surroundings and strengthening its position and image. In the document, one of the strategic goals of the University is "...continuously supporting the sense of belonging and community by building and developing an organizational culture orientated towards human well-being and the values of the university. This is the primary goal of all activities carried out by the authorities and staff of the University of Lodz. We want to continue to create a friendly place of work and study for the entire University community and support it by proposing activities that integrate and build a sense of identity with the Alma Mater (Strategy of the University of Lodz 2021-2030).

Results

Description of the goals and effects of the project (including practical applications).

For one of the first tasks to be achieved in the project "Free the Energy!" it was necessary to build the turnout. It should be noted that the project was launched in a difficult period, the so-called second wave of the COVID-19 epidemic. The adopted strategy to promote outdoor running as a way to counteract the negative effects of epidemic restrictions turned out to be right. Over three months, over a dozen people participated in the classes, of which nearly 10 were regular participants. Thus, we managed to build not only attendance but also retention. It is also worth mentioning that not a single case of coronavirus was recorded in the group of participants.

In terms of training goals, significant achievements include organizing knowledge in the area of training theory, correct execution of movement patterns, and the ability to appropriately use training methods and means. Thanks to this approach, participants reduced the risk of injury and, moreover, made their physical activity more thought-out and diverse.

During the project implementation period, 101 running training sessions were conducted, which amounted to 151.5 training hours. Based on prepared training plans, University of Lodz employees ran nearly 400 kilometers from October to December. A total of 14 people took part in the training, i.e. 7 administrative employees and 7 teaching and research employees.

5 km control tests were periodically organized. These tests made it possible to determine the participants' endurance level and set realistic and individualized training goals. Another important element of improving the training process was working on improving the running technique. Methodical work on learning and improving individual phases of the running step and analysis of the video material contributed to conscious work on implementing correct movement habits.

Information about the implementation of the "Free the Energy!" project is transmitted through publicly available media. At the very beginning of the project, on 30 September 2020, a detailed description of the activities carried out was published in the Newsletter of the University of Lodz (No. 558), encouraging members of the academic community to participate in the project. Moreover, on October 7, 2020, project manager dr. Piotr Kędzia took part in a radio broadcast on Student Radio "Zak", which was devoted to a discussion on the goals of the project. A permanent platform for disseminating information used to promote and provide news from training sessions is the Facebook social network. Every week, after each training session, a post with a photo appears in a specially created group. Currently, this group has 90 members, employees of the University of Lodz. Information about the project was also posted on the website of the University of Lodz, and periodically this information appears in the faculty newsletters of the University of Lodz.

In addition to achievements in the form of attendance and improvement of the training process, the integration of the academic community is undoubtedly a great value achieved in the project. Trainings carried out, in addition to working on physical fitness work, have also become a place to make new friends, conduct discussions on various current topics, share specialist knowledge in the scientific fields represented by project participants, an opportunity to symbolically celebrate calendar holidays together, and inspiration to undertake various activities and also teaching and research initiatives.

It should be noted that the project is continued through the "Free the Energy 2.0!" project, which has the same goals and group of recipients and is implemented in the period from October 1. 2022 – September 30. 2024.

During its implementation, in addition to running events, the project members also carried out other activities that promote sports, including:

- The success related to the project implementation of the "Free the Energy!" inspired the project manager to take another initiative to promote physical activity. The project manager wrote a project titled: "Train with the University of Lodz! Run for health", which was also positively evaluated and received funding from the Program of the Minister of Science and Higher Education entitled Social responsibility of science -

Popularization of science and promotion of sport (project implementation date: 01/01/2022-31/12/2023). In this project, the group of recipients has been expanded; i.e. the project was addressed to members of the academic community of the University of Lodz, as well as other willing residents of the voivodeship. It was assumed that over a 2 years, a total of 60 participants would receive support in the form of running training. Running training takes place once a week, for 1.5 hours, in the city park, under the supervision of an experienced coach Piotr Kędzia. However, the interest in the training exceeded the expectations of the project authors. The weekly attendance lists show that in 2022, a total of 78 people (34 women and 44 men) participated in the training. Through systematic training, participants strengthened their muscular, circulatory, respiratory and immune systems and prevented many lifestyle diseases. Moreover, training in a group and in the open air promoted the development of interpersonal contacts, reduced stress levels, taught time management and facilitated contact with nature. The park enabled continuous and intermittent training. Moreover, an additional advantage was the possibility of using the park's infrastructure for exercises, e.g. benches to develop strength and mobility, or the use of trees for exercises for a healthy spine.

- On June 7, 2021 in the Lagiewnicki Forest as part of the "Free the Energy!" project, a jubilee run was held to mark the 75th anniversary of the University of Lodz. The event was organized in the form of a sports picnic for the entire university community. It had a special character because it expressed intergenerational communication and the spirit of perseverance in the era of fighting the epidemic. The main 5 km race was completed by 127 people and the children's race by 46 young sports enthusiasts. The best male and female runners were awarded in three categories, and all participants received, among others: a commemorative T-shirt and a medal. There was a friendly atmosphere during the event. The participants feasted together, and the children benefitted from the playground and animations, and took part in competitions for souvenir prizes related to the University of Lodz. Everyone was treated to a barbecue and other snacks. The event was a great organizational success. Already during the event, many participants asked whether it would be a cyclical event.
- On May 15, 2022, the next University of Lodz Run "Free the Energy!" took place under the honorary patronage of the Rector of the University of Lodz. It was the second edition of the cross-country run carried out as part of the university-wide project "Free the Energy!". The picnic formula of the competition attracted a wide group of employees, students, and supporters of the University of Lodz. Each participant received a starting package with a T-shirt, a commemorative medal for completing the race, and the opportunity to enjoy a barbecue refreshment. The organizers also took care of attractions for the children. The most important ones included: a run over a distance of approximately 1 km, games and animations, and a prize draw. It is worth highlighting

that up to 45 runners completed the children's race. The main race was held in the Lagiewnicki Forest, on a quite demanding route, the distance of which was approximately 5 km. 165 competitors took part in the race. Similarly to last year, the classification included women and men in the open, employee, and student categories. All the people who took a place on the podium also received prizes.

- On July 10, 2022, the first edition of the University Athletics Picnic was organized as part of the "Train with UŁ" project! "I am running for health." The competition took place at the AZS Łódź stadium. The event program included running competitions over distances of 60 m and 1000 m and the Swedish relay. Each participant could participate in any number of competitions. Individual runs over the above-mentioned distances were held in individual age categories: 6-7 years, 8-9 years, 10-11 years, 12-13 years, and 14-15 years, 16-17 years, 18 years and older. On the day of the event, there was a total of 295 people on the starting list (170 men and 125 women), which means that the limit of participants planned in the application, which was 300 people, was practically used.
- On July 2, 2023, the second edition of the University Athletics Picnic took place as part of the 'Train with University in Łodz' project! „I am running for health". The competition took place at the AZS Lodz stadium. The event program included running competitions over distances of 60 m and 1000 m and the Swedish 100x200x300x400 m relay. Each participant could participate in any number of competitions. Individual runs over the above-mentioned distances were held in the following age categories: 6-7 years, 8-9 years, 10-11 years, 12-13 years, 14-15 years, 16-17 years, 18 years and older. On the day of the event, there were a total of 147 people on the starting list (83 men and 64 women), which means that the limit of participants planned in the application was reached used.
- On October 1, 2023, a running event was held entitled "Cross Five of the University of Lodz", a run carried out as part of the project "Train with the University of Lodz! "I am running for health". The main 5 km race was completed by 251 runners, the children's race by 40 participants, and the youth race by 66 participants. All registered participants received a starter package with a T-shirt, a commemorative medal, cosmetics, and refreshments. Furthermore, children could use the playground and other attractions. Statuettes and university gifts were prepared for the best runners participating in three races. At the end of the competition, a voucher was drawn among all participants for a weekend stay for two people in the Beskid Niski.
- On June 30, 2024, in the Lagiewnicki Forest as part of the "Free the energy!" project, another University of Lodz run. The event was organized in the form of a sports picnic for the entire university community. For people working and studying at the University of Lodz, there was a main run of 5 km, for children - a run of 200 m, and for young people - a run of 1 km. 141 runners (women and men) took part in the 5 km run and the

children's race by 28 young sports enthusiasts. Cups for the first three places were awarded to the winners in the open category, UŁ employees and students. All participants received, among others: a commemorative T-shirt and a medal.

Other activities promoting sport and sustainable development carried out by project participants:

- Since 2020, teams consisting of University of Lodz employees represent the university in the annual charity run organized by Poland Business Run. In 2022, the team "Free the Energy!" was established, consisting of runners participating in training as part of the project. In 2023, the University of Lodz was represented by a total of ten 5-person relay teams (31 women and 19 men). In the 2023 edition of the race, we managed to gather a team composed of the fastest running university employees. 4 of the team members are participants in the Free the Energy!) project. In the final competition, the "Greyhounds of the University of Lodz" team took the 18th place out of 4,293 teams from all over Poland and the 3rd place among mixed teams.
- Participants in the "Free the Energy!" project also regularly participate in running competitions organized in Poland, including: CITY TRAIL (5 participants), Lowicz Autumn Half Marathon (3 participants), Szakala Autumn Festival (5 participants), Lodz Mountain Runs (2 participants), Rossman Run along Piotrkowska Street (5 participants), DOZ-Marathon (5 participants), Run New Year's Eve Lodz (5 participants), Athens Marathon Greece (1 participant) and compete in the Polish, European and World Masters Championships (1 participant).
- Thanks to the cooperation and determination of the participants of the "Free the Energy!" project, and "Free the Energy 2.0!" The running section at the University of Lodz was established in September 2023, with 37 members enrolled. The Running Section brings together amateurs and professionals, running fans, who have the right to use the Company Social Benefits Fund of the University of Lodz, in particular, employees of the University of Lodz and eligible members of their families. The Running Section aims to popularize running as a form of exercise available to everyone, improve the level of health and physical fitness of the Running Section members, integrate the academic community of the University of Lodz, and promote the University of Lodz as a company that cares about the sustainable development of its employees. The Running Section pursues its goals through the following activities: organizing running training for members of the Running Section, organizing sports camps for members of the Running Section, co-financing the participation of members of the Running Section in running events organized in Poland by co-financing entry fees, purchasing running T-shirts with the University of Lodz logo and organizing competitions, running for the academic community of the University of Lodz.

- The integration of project members and common interests also led to activities popularizing science and sports by organizing an expert panel entitled "Speed, strength, success - sport as a catalyst for social development" at the 16th European Economic Forum - Lodz 2023 (12/06/2023). The panel aimed to discuss the role of sport in a healthy lifestyle and the development prospects of the Lodz Voivodeship. During the meeting, the speakers presented their experiences as players, scientists and social activists involved in matters of physical culture and sports. Good practices and challenges in the promotion of physical activity as a component of a healthy lifestyle were discussed (including the Free the Energy! project) and the use of sports activity in the promotion of cities and regions.

The analyses of the research results presented below were based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews that were conducted with participants of running training as part of the Free the Energy! project. The respondents' statements concern their reflections and experiences in the implementation of the project's goals.

The study was conducted in September and October 2023. 14 project participants, 8 women, and 6 men took part in the study. These are people aged 38 to 54, 6 research and teaching employees, 1 teaching employee, and 7 administrative employees.

Due to the limited space for presenting research results, when categorizing the data obtained during the interview, we tried to select the most illustrative and significant ones related to the individual goals of the project. This meant that the presented analyses did not quote all respondents' statements, but only those that best fit the scope of the information sought.

Based on the analysis of respondents' statements, the prevailing opinions are that the Free the Energy! project promotes the University of Lodz as a company that cares about the sustainable development of its employees.

This is an excellent promotion of the idea of work-life balance.

The University of Lodz, as the project implementer, offers running training to its employees, creating friendly conditions for physical activity and integration, and taking care of the well-being of its employees.

Only thanks to the huge commitment of the creators and organizers of the project (university employees) can the University of Lodz appear as such a company. These people consistently point to the University of Lodz as an institution closely associated with the project. As part of organized sports events, facilities belonging to the University of Lodz are also used, which additionally (positively) affects the image of the university.

The implementation of the Free the Energy! project is also consistent with the goals formulated in the University of Lodz strategy. Although the project's activities focus on promoting physical activity, physical activity has a positive impact on the mental and physical health of the employees who participate in this project, and this is an important element of building a sustainable organization.

The analysis of the statements shows that the project definitely promotes a healthy and active lifestyle among the employees of the University of Lodz.

The project promotes a healthy and active lifestyle not only by organizing training sessions, but also by organizing family sports competitions, which allows the promotion of an active lifestyle of entire families.

Definitely YES, design activities promote a healthy and active lifestyle! Training meetings are not only about performing specific exercises and tasks. Participants also receive a really large dose of knowledge about the benefits of an active lifestyle, but also about health problems that may result from the lack of such activity.

The training and competitions organized are a specific offer to promote a healthy lifestyle.

I have been working at the university for more than 15 years and this is the first such well-thought-out initiative that actually promotes a healthy lifestyle for the entire academic community. These activities are also professionally prepared by specialists in this field, after all, the coach is an Olympic champion!

The respondents emphasized in their statements that the project objectives in terms of improving the psychophysical condition, increasing knowledge and skills in rational physical activity, correct body posture, and healthy eating habits had been achieved.

Training under the supervision of a professional trainer not only improved my performance and physical fitness, but also increased my awareness of a healthy lifestyle.

Thanks to my participation in the Free the Energy! project, I gained knowledge about running techniques, stretching, rolling, building fitness, regeneration after training, preparing for competitions, but I also learnt how to choose sports clothing and footwear.

Each training session is an opportunity to acquire extensive knowledge about rational physical activity, proper body posture, and healthy eating habits. All consultations provided by the trainer are extremely valuable, as they have significantly expanded my knowledge of physical activity.

As a project trainer, I had the opportunity to learn from the participants. In sports theory, this is one of the best ways to acquire knowledge.

By participating in training, I increased my awareness of my abilities and limitations in the field of running activities. As a result, I improved my sports results but it also encouraged me to continue working on myself. These trainings not only "free the energy", but also "clear the mind" of negative thoughts.

Professional training and the knowledge transferred during it allowed for added value in the area of psychophysical condition.

The best recommendation of the acquired knowledge on improving psychophysical condition, increasing skills in rational physical activity, correct body posture, and healthy eating habits is that none of the project participants had any injuries throughout the duration of the project, most of us improved our running results (regularly checked by the trainer), and I also lost more than 5 kg!

One of the most important advantages of this project, which was particularly noted by respondents, is the integration of the academic community.

This project showed that it is not just about running. It turned out that the project participants integrated very well and very quickly, that thanks to this project we were able to get to know each other, i.e. employees from different faculties or departments, and that we could support each other in difficult moments, e.g. the pandemic or the outbreak of war in Ukraine. It turned out that thanks to the first project, we started cooperation in writing the second project and the continuation of the "Free the Energy!" project, we also write joint scientific papers and share knowledge.

Integration thanks to the project takes place on various levels: in the social field - people simply liked each other, made friends, and started meeting each other outside of work; in the professional field - they started cooperation on other projects and even united in the Running Section of the University of Lodz. Integrated research workers and administrative workers. We can also mention intergenerational integration: in addition to adult employees, their children also took part in the running competitions carried out as part of the project.

On the one hand, the project gave us the opportunity to get to know each other. Getting to know employees of various professional levels and people performing various functions at our university. The training brought together people with similar/common interests. The approach of the Trainer is extremely important here, as he consistently refers to our group as a "Team". This, in my opinion, makes us feel really part of one group and also closer to each other. This also translates into friendships outside of training.

Integration is a huge advantage of these trainings. I take part in the training because I simply like being with the project participants, we like each other. We exchange knowledge, talk about current topics not only related to professional work, and support each other. While running, you can listen to interesting lectures from participants, e.g. on archaeology, economics, or trends in management or sports. The good "spirit" of our group is the Coach, who is able to lead our team very well. We also meet outside of training and this proves the great integration of our group.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the research results confirms the achievement of the goals of Free the Energy! project. The project activities achieved the main goals, i.e. promoting physical activity as one of the main components of a healthy lifestyle and one of the elements of building a sustainable organization. The specific objectives of the project were also achieved: promoting a healthy and active lifestyle among employees of the University of Lodz; improving the psychophysical condition of participants; increasing employees' knowledge and skills in

rational physical activity, correct body posture and healthy eating habits, and stimulating the integration of the academic community. Statements of project participants and analysis of documentation (mainly project reports) confirm the thesis that universities that support their employees in taking up physical activity, and thus a healthy lifestyle, contribute to better mental and physical well-being, social integration, better achievements at work, increased professional satisfaction of employees and, at the same time, greater identification with the university, which is important from the point of view of the university's strategy and challenges for contemporary sustainable organizations.

The challenge in the future is to build a larger turnout of project participants. One of the weaknesses is perhaps too little information about the availability of training for employees of the University of Lodz.

It should be emphasized that the success associated with the implementation of the "Free the Energy!" project inspired the authors of the project to take further initiatives aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle, including further projects, the creation of a running section at the University of Lodz, and participation in popular science events popularizing science and sport.

The implementation of the project also significantly contributed to the integration of the academic community of the University of Lodz and the promotion of the University of Lodz as a company that cares about the sustainable development of its employees.

The obtained results inspire further research work in identifying good practices in promoting a healthy lifestyle that are part of building sustainable organizations; they also constitute the basis for formulating many valuable applications for organizations such as universities in the implementation of similar programs.

6. Summary

The synthetic review of the literature on sustainable development, physical activity as one of the main components of a healthy lifestyle, and the presentation of activities that support increased physical activity of employees as an important element in building a sustainable organization indicate that this is an extremely important topic of research in modern organizations. Healthy employees play a key role in the sustainable development of an organization. Therefore, special emphasis should be placed on activities that promote a healthy lifestyle in organizations.

Physical activity and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, investing in policies that promote walking, cycling, sport, active recreation and play can directly contribute to achieving many of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Policies on physical activity have multiplicative health benefits, social and economic and will directly contribute to achieving SDG3 (good health and well-being) as well as other goals, including SDG2 (end all forms of

malnutrition); SDG4 (quality of education); SDG5 (gender equality); SDG8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure); SDG10 (reducing inequality); SDG11 (sustainable cities and communities); SDG12 (responsible production and consumption); SDG13 (climate action); SDG15 (life on land); SDG16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG17 (partnerships) (World Health Organization, 1994).

Poor health of employees and, consequently, of society leads to a slowdown in the dynamics of economic development. Therefore, it is so important to promote a healthy lifestyle among employees, with particular emphasis on physical activity. Promoting a healthy lifestyle is one in the basic elements of implementing sustainable development. As part of the implementation of sustainable development, it is necessary to adapt the market economy to the culture of a healthy lifestyle (Róžańska-Bińczyk, 2021).

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