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NORDIC NETWORK OF ADAPTED LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES
– AN OVERVIEW

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The aim of this thesis was to collect information regarding the Nordic network by participating in the network conference in September 2017. The design used in this thesis was a qualitative non-experimental research. The objectives of the thesis included defining what is Nordic network and who are the people involved in this network; and finding out how this network contributes to inclusion and develops adapted leisure time activities. Furthermore, the objective was to help develop this network based on the feedback received from the participants.

In the theoretical framework of this thesis the key concepts equality, inclusion, accessibility and adapted physical activity are defined. Moreover, in the theoretical part the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) is presented, and its key concepts are explained.

Method of data collection used in this thesis was a questionnaire. The aim of the questionnaire was to collect qualitative information concerning the network from the participants. The questionnaire included questions regarding the background of participants, as well as their expectations concerning this network. Furthermore, the participants were asked about the situation of adapted leisure time activities in their countries and how they perceive the concept "open access for all".

As emerged from the answers, the participants found the conference useful. They emphasized the importance of meeting colleagues from other countries working in the field and sharing ideas on how to promote participation of people with disabilities. However, the participants were not completely satisfied with the content of the event. The information received in advance was not sufficient and there could have been more time for discussion and networking in the program.

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1 INTRODUCTION

About 20-25% of the Finnish population have functional ability limitations that are affecting their ability to take part in mainstream activities. Therefore, they need special adaptations in order to being able to participate. Since the population is ageing and the number of people having functional limitations is growing, the need for adapted services keeps increasing. (Website of the Kuntoutussäätiö 2018; Website of the Finnish Society of Sport Sciences 2018.)

Physical inactivity is the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality. (WHO 2010, 10.) Regular exercise has been proven to have positive effects on physical and mental health. According to World Health Organization (2018) there is strong evidence showing that individuals who are physically active have lower rates of mortality and many diseases such as type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, cancer and depression. Secondly, they are less likely to have a hip or vertebral fracture and they have a higher level of muscular and cardiorespiratory fitness. And thirdly, they are more likely to maintain a healthy body weight and body composition. (Website of the World Health Organization 2018.)

Adapted physical activity (APA) is a concept used in describing the physical activity of people who have functional ability limitations as a result of a disease, injury or other kind of disadvantage affecting their ability to take part in mainstream physical activities. (Website of the Finnish Society of Sport Sciences 2018.) Open-access physical activity helps to improve inclusion. Moreover, taking part in physical activities is a way of making new contacts and motivates to be in an interaction with others. Thereby participating in physical activity also helps to prevent exclusion and reduces the stigma associated with disability. (Website of the Kuntoutussäätiö 2018.)

From the human rights and equality perspective it is important that an individual has a freedom to choose a form of activity based on the individual needs, interests and expectations. The diagnosis should not be an obstacle for participation. (Rintala, Huovinen & Niemelä 2012, 220.)

2 EQUALITY

According to the Finnish constitution everyone is equal before the law and no one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the ground of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or other reason that concerns his or her person (The Constitution of Finland 731/1999, section 6). Persons with disabilities may face various barriers that can hinder their participation in society on an equal basis with others. The United Nations has developed The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The purpose of the Convention is to change attitudes towards persons with disabilities. According to this Convention, all persons with all types of disabilities must have a right to enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. (Website of the United Nations 2018.)

The Convention emphasizes equality and non-discrimination in all aspects of life. Based on the Convention, people with disabilities have to be equally recognized before the law. All discrimination on the basis of disability should be prohibited and an equal legal protection against discrimination should be guaranteed. States Parties are responsible for taking appropriate measures to ensure the accessibility to persons with disabilities. That concerns the physical environment, transportation, information and communications and other facilities and services open or provided to the public. (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006, 7-9.)

3 INCLUSION AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Inclusion is associated with health and equality. Good physical health enables the participation and inclusion better than poor physical health. Inclusion can be achieved in spite of the restrictions related to physical health, and it can be seen in the society in social systems and factors improving inclusion (e.g. the feeling of safety). (Rouvinen-Wilenius & Koskinen-Ollonqvist, 56.)

According to Raivio & Karjalainen (2013) inclusion is three-dimensional. The first criterion of inclusion is that one has sufficient material resources to be used (HAVING). Secondly, one is able to make decisions concerning one's own life

(ACTING). And thirdly, one has socially meaningful and important relationships (BELONGING). These three elements can be considered as a triangle (Figure 1) that, when in balance, represents the well-being of an individual, and is reflected in the society as social sustainability. Moreover, deficiency in one of the elements of inclusion increases the risk of exclusion and compromises inclusion. (Website of the THL 2018.)

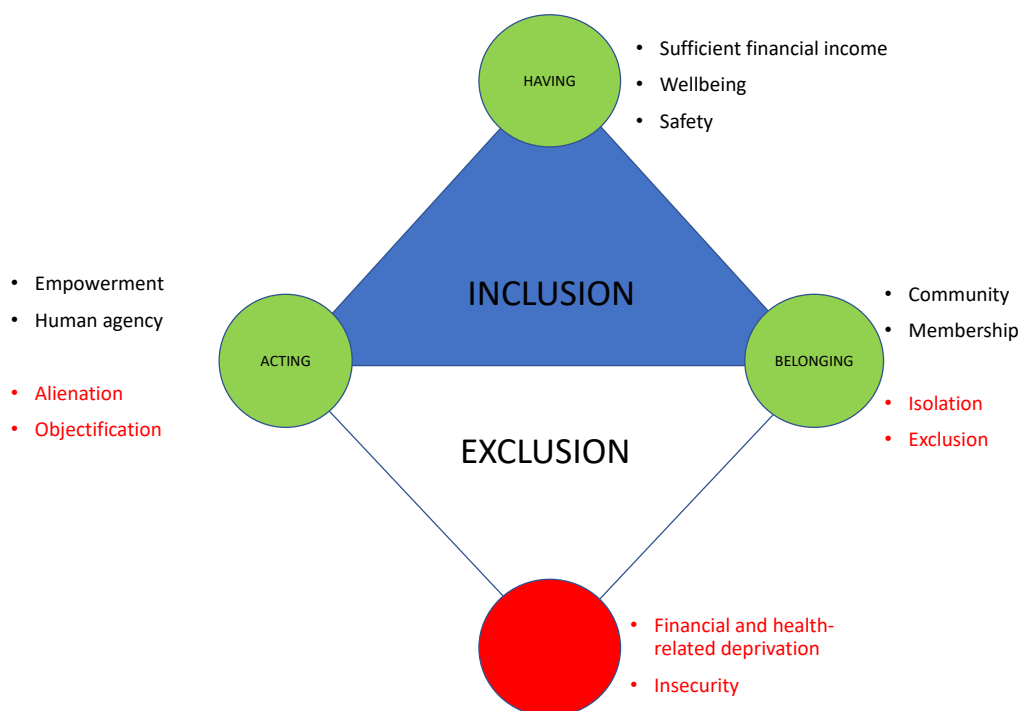


Figure 1. Inclusion triangle (Modified from Raivio & Karjalainen 2013)

Social sustainability is a part of sustainable development and targets to ensure the wellbeing of people today and in the future. Social sustainability aims to reduce inequality between people by ensuring sufficient income, proper health care, education and the realization of the fundamental human rights. The global challenges for the realization of social sustainability and welfare include the growth of population, poverty and inequality. Also inequality between the genders, organizing education and ensuring the health care can be considered as worldwide problems. In Finland current issues concerning social sustainability are unemployment and social exclusion. (Website of the Finnish United Nations Association 2018; Website of the United Nations, Division for Sustainable Development Goals 2018.)

4 ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is an essential element in regards of being able to participate in the society. Accessibility improves equality, promotes the realization of human rights and decreases exclusion (Rintala, Huovinen & Niemelä 2012, 70-71; UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006, 9-10). The World Program of Action concerning Disabled Persons states that “accessibility in the general systems of society, such as the physical and cultural environment, housing and transportation, social and health services, educational and work opportunities, cultural and social life, including sports and recreational facilities is essential to furthering its development objective of equalization of opportunities” (United Nations 2013, 8). Furthermore, accessibility is an important issue concerning all spheres of society, enabling persons with disabilities to fully enjoy the human rights and fundamental freedoms (United Nations 2013, 9).

Accessibility is not only a matter of physical environment, but also involves immaterial aspects such as receiving information, services and other products. Accessibility is also a matter of attitudes, depending on how the decision-makers are able to take into account the needs of various user groups. (Pesola 2009, 1.) Negative attitudes can build barriers even after physical barriers have been removed. Awareness needs to be raised in order to overcome the ignorance and prejudice concerning disability. Education regarding accessibility and its importance should be incorporated into professional training in the fields of architecture, construction, design, informatics and marketing. (WHO 2011, 169.)

4.1 Accessibility of the physical activity services

Accessibility of physical activity services is a matter of human rights and equality (Korkiala 2015, 5). Accessible physical activity means that all the people, despite of their functional capacity, are able to take part in physical activity services with as little barriers as possible. A well-designed service is open for all, enabling the participation regardless of individual features. The prerequisite for accessibility is that the service providers (clubs, associations, municipalities etc.) are aware of the possible barriers that may affect the usage of services. The barriers may be associated with attitudes,

information, difficulty of understanding, physical and economic factors or deficiencies concerning decision making. (Rintala, Huovinen & Niemelä 2012, 69-72.)

4.2 Factors restricting participation in physical activity

People with disabilities may face various environmental and individual factors restricting the participation. The barriers can be divided into physical, logistical and psychological (Korkiala 2015, 22). Physical barriers include problems associated with accessibility. Many physical activity facilities are old and do not necessarily meet the modern building standards. Although many older facilities have been renovated, there are still many facilities that do not meet the needs of the disabled. Physical barriers also include equipment related deficiencies and the lack of adapted physical activity services. Furthermore, experienced pain, tiredness and other symptoms related to health conditions can be classified as physical barriers. (Korkiala 2015, 21-22.)

Logistical barriers restricting the participation in physical activity mostly include problems related to transportation and assistance. Transportation related costs and the participation fees can be remarkable barriers for persons with disabilities. The long distances to physical activity facilities and the absence of local services is a major problem restricting the participation. Often people with disabilities are not capable of taking part in physical activity without the help of a personal assistant. Therefore, finding a personal assistant can also be a challenge. Furthermore, logistical barriers can be related to communication and information. People with disabilities are not always aware of the possibilities because of lack of information. (Korkiala 2015, 22.)

Taking part in physical activity can be restricted by various psychological and social factors. As can be seen in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), the functional capacity of an individual is influenced by the environmental factors. These environmental factors not only include the physical but also various social factors such as attitudes, support provided by others, services and political decisions. Negative experiences concerning physical activity, lack of self-confidence, social isolation and the attitudes towards the disabled affect the

participation in physical activity. (Korkiala 2015, 22; Rintala, Huovinen & Niemelä 2012, 43-44.)

5 ADAPTED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (APA)

The target group of APA are people who are for some reason (disease, injury, reduced functional capacity) not able to take part in commonly available physical activity and who need adaptations and special knowledge in order to take part in physical activity (Korkiala 2015, 12). APA can be interpreted in many ways depending on the perspective it is being inspected from. It can be interpreted as a general concept for the physical activity and sports of people with disabilities (Website of Vammaisurheilu 2017), “an umbrella term for all services, that promote an active healthy lifestyle, for persons with special needs through physical activity and sports.” (Count me in 2006, 19). APA can also be defined as physical activity of persons with disabilities, diseases or other kind of disadvantages affecting the functional capacity and the ability to take part in the mainstream activities, and who need special adaptations for being able to take part in physical activities (Website of SoveLi 2017).

Another way of defining APA is to look at it as a branch of science. The International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity has defined APA as following: “Adapted physical activity is a professional branch of kinesiology/physical education/sport & human movement sciences, which is directed toward persons who require adaptation for participation in the context of physical activity.” (Website of the International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity 2018.) Sherrill & Hutzler (2008) have defined APA from sports science perspective as following: “Adapted physical activity science is research, theory and practice directed toward persons of all ages underserved by the general sport sciences, disadvantaged in resources, or lacking power to access equal physical activity opportunities and rights.”

The adaptations of physical activity are associated with appropriate equipment, task criteria, instructions, physical and social environments and rules. The principles of

APA can be applied to other population groups that may face participation restrictions regarding mainstream physical activity. APA requires individualization of instruction, finding appropriate activities, as well as adapting environment in order to improve participation in physical activity. (Website of the International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity 2018.)

5.1 History of APA

The way how we perceive people with disabilities has changed a lot compared to early history. Individuals with disabilities have been treated poorly and inaccurately perceived throughout the history. They were considered to be harmful economic liabilities during periods of war and commerce. It was believed that disability is a sign of God's disfavor or it is caused by a sin. In the classical literature people with disabilities are often described as beggars, thieves or heroes. On the contrary, average people are valued for contributing and being capable. Persons having disabilities were for a long time neglected and isolated from the society. However, as a result of various social, technological, human rights and legislative forces, individuals with disabilities have a right to be treated equally in the society. (Steadward, Wheeler & Watkinson, 12-13.)

The main influencers of the Finnish adapted physical activity have been the school system, the field of sports and physical activity, the sports associations for people with disabilities as well as wars and the development of medicine (Kaurala & Väärälä 2010; Kummu 2007). School physical education leads back to the 1800s. Already back then the importance of health and prevention of diseases were emphasized in physical education. Physical education teachers were at that time more responsible for health care. The reason for that was concern about the poor health condition of the school-aged youth. Thus the aim of physical education was to improve the health condition of the students who were in poor shape, which is from the medical perspective ideologically similar to the principle of adapted physical activity. (Rintala, Huovinen & Niemelä 2012, 10-11.)

Another factor influencing the Finnish APA was the development of the field of sports, thereby also affecting the sports for people with disabilities. In the beginning of the 1900's there were many sports associations and organizations established, and also the first sports associations of the persons with disabilities were initiated. (Rintala, Huovinen & Niemelä 2012, 11.) The third factor influencing APA was the need for rehabilitation after the world wars. The society was forced to pay attention to the need and importance of the activity of people with special needs. The fourth factor promoting the APA was knowledge of the positive influence of exercise on health and physical fitness. Using physical activity as a part of disease management built a foundation for the development of APA. (Rintala, Huovinen & Niemelä 2012, 11.)

5.2 The importance of physical activity for people with disabilities

Physical activity is known to have many benefits on physical and mental health. Regular exercise has also been proven to help prevent many diseases as well as promote the functional capacity and health. (Website of the UKK Institute 2018; Website of the World Health Organization 2018.) Figure 2 represents the recommendations on physical activity for people with disabilities. It can be seen that physical activity affects many aspects of life in a positive way. Being physically active not only improves the physical fitness and health, but also helps to build social relationships and promotes inclusion. (Davies, Burns, Jewell & McBride 2011, 32-36.)



Figure 2. Physical activity recommendations for disabled adults (UK Chief Medical Officers' Guidelines 2011)

The importance of participating in sports depends on the age of an individual. Also, the severity and the nature of a disease or a disability affect the way an individual is able to move, as well as in which kind of physical activities he or she is capable of taking part in. Although there are plenty of options for being physically active, there are factors such as the adaptability of the activities, availability of an individual assistant or transportation, accessibility of the venues and availability of the special assistive aids for sports, that may affect the participation in sports. (Rintala 2015, 12.)

Being able to take part in leisure time activities is important in regards of being part of the society. Taking part in leisure time activities not only helps to make social relationships but also helps to develop skills required in various life situations. Sports activities not only teach how to win, but also how to lose and how to tolerate losing. Hobbies are an important part of shaping the identity, offering peer support and role models. (Website of the National Institute for Health and Welfare 2018.) Physical activity is an essential factor affecting the physical, mental and social development of

individuals with chronic diseases and disabilities. Correctly implemented physical activity helps to gain the experience of success, thereby offering motivation to stay physically active throughout the life span. (Rintala 2015, 12.)

5.3 Acts related to APA

The most important act regarding organizing APA is the Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity (390/2015). According to this act the municipalities are responsible for promoting the physical activity of various population groups. The municipalities are also obligated to ensure the accessibility of these activities. Adapted physical education in schools is regulated by Basic Education Act (628/1998) as well as by the curricula. Transportation and assistance related services are arranged based on the Act on Disability Services and Assistance (380/1987). Accessibility of the sports facilities on the other hand is regulated by various regulations and acts concerning building and land use. (Rintala, Huovinen & Niemelä 2012, 489; Website of Finlex 2018.)

5.4 Actors in the field of APA in Finland

APA in Finland is organized by municipalities and various organizations. At the municipality level the responsibility of organizing APA is on their physical activity department. There are about 310 municipalities in Finland, 95 of which have full-time APA instructors. Most of the municipalities do not have full-time APA instructors, and 30% of these small municipalities do not have organized APA. At the local level APA is organized by local organizations, associations and sports clubs. (Website of the Liikuntatieteellinen Seura 2018; Rintala, Huovinen & Niemelä 2012, 489-495.)

Finnish Sports Association of Persons with Disabilities (VAU) is a Finnish umbrella sports organization for people with disabilities. VAU is a non-governmental organization planning and developing the physical activity for people with special needs. VAU also helps to develop accessibility of the sports facilities by offering the necessary knowledge and education. Moreover, VAU functions as a national sports

federation organizing sports activities for sports that do not have a national federation. (Website of the Finnish Sports Association of Persons with Disabilities 2018.)

The Finnish Adapted Physical Activity Federation (SoveLi) is a national organization promoting health enhancing physical activity that helps to maintain functional ability. SoveLi aims to promote equal opportunities regarding participation in physical activity. SoveLi has 20 national member organizations in the field of disability, physical activity and public health. SoveLi works in cooperation with these organizations, promoting the physical activity within the organizations and improving the collaboration between the member organizations. SoveLi aims to develop APA on the national, regional, local and international level. (Website of SoveLi 2018.)

The Finnish Paralympic Committee (FPC) represents the Finnish top athletes with disabilities. It is responsible for coordinating the top-level disability sports. FPC elects the athletes representing Finland in the Paralympic Games and is also responsible for funding the Finnish Paralympic team. The key values of FPC include dedication, passion, equality and goal-orientation regarding sports. The Committee also aims to raise the awareness regarding Paralympic Games as an elite sports competition in order to broaden the understanding of elite sports. Members of the Paralympic committee include VAU and 20 sports federations responsible for arranging the top-level sports. (Website of the Finnish Paralympic Committee 2018.)

Matkalla, liikkeellä, keskellä elämää (MALIKE) was initiated in 1997 and its aim was to ensure the quality of life and childhood for children with various disabilities. MALIKE started off as a pilot project of the EU Commission, however later on it became permanently a part of Finnish Disability Support Association (Kehitysvammaisten Tukiliitto ry). In 2007 MALIKE launched the Adult-MALIKE project and since 2012 MALIKE has served people with severe disabilities of all ages. MALIKE is meant for people needing assistive equipment and help from others in order to participate and be physically active. MALIKE's mission is to promote the participation of people with severe disabilities for to provide them new possibilities and experiences. This mission is supported by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. MALIKE organizes functional courses for the families of children and adults with severe disabilities, as well as events for trying out assistive equipment

enabling participation in various activities regardless of diagnosis. (Website of the Finnish Disability Support Association 2018.)

6 INTERNATIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF FUNCTIONING, DISABILITY AND HEALTH (ICF) AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

APA has been associated with an ecological view of the action systems theory, consisting of interaction between person, environment and task. This view is comparable with the major components presented in the ICF. (Hutzler 2010, 3.) The classification system identifying ranges of functional limitations provides an equal starting point based on functional ability, increasing the likelihood of equal status of participation (Hutzler 2010, 8).

ICF is a framework for organizing and documenting information on functioning and disability, providing a common language for disability (WHO 2013, 3). According to ICF, functioning is a dynamic interaction between a person's health condition, environmental factors and personal factors (Figure 3). Environment should be adapted according to the functional capacity of an individual, thereby enabling the participation within the limits of an individual's functional capacity. (WHO 2013, 5.) The ICF model, compared to the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps (ICIDH), concentrates on the positive aspects of functional capacity, activities and participation (Stakes 2009). It emphasizes health and functioning instead of disability and handicap. Every human being may experience some level of disability during the life span, therefore disability is a universal human experience not only affecting the minority of humanity. (WHO 2012, 3.)

ICF is an important tool for all the professionals working with people having disabilities. ICF can be used in the multi-professional collaboration between physical activity, health care and social work professionals in the field of APA. (Hutzler & Sherrill 2007.) Therefore, by providing a holistic approach and ensuring person-

centered care, ICF can help to improve patient experience and strengthen the health systems (WHO 2013, 47; 68).

6.1 Disability

WHO defines disability as “the outcome or result of a complex relationship between an individual’s health condition and personal factors that represent the circumstances in which the individual lives” (WHO 2002). This approach no longer classifies people, but instead describes the situation of an individual within the context of environmental and personal factors. The environment can either facilitate or, by having barriers, restrict the individual’s performance. Thereby also society can either inhibit an individual’s performance by creating barriers or by not providing the necessary facilitators. (WHO 2013, 40.) The contextual factors of the ICF include the environmental and personal factors. The environmental factors not only involve the physical environment, but also attitudes, support provided by others, services, and the government’s institutions (Stakes 2009).

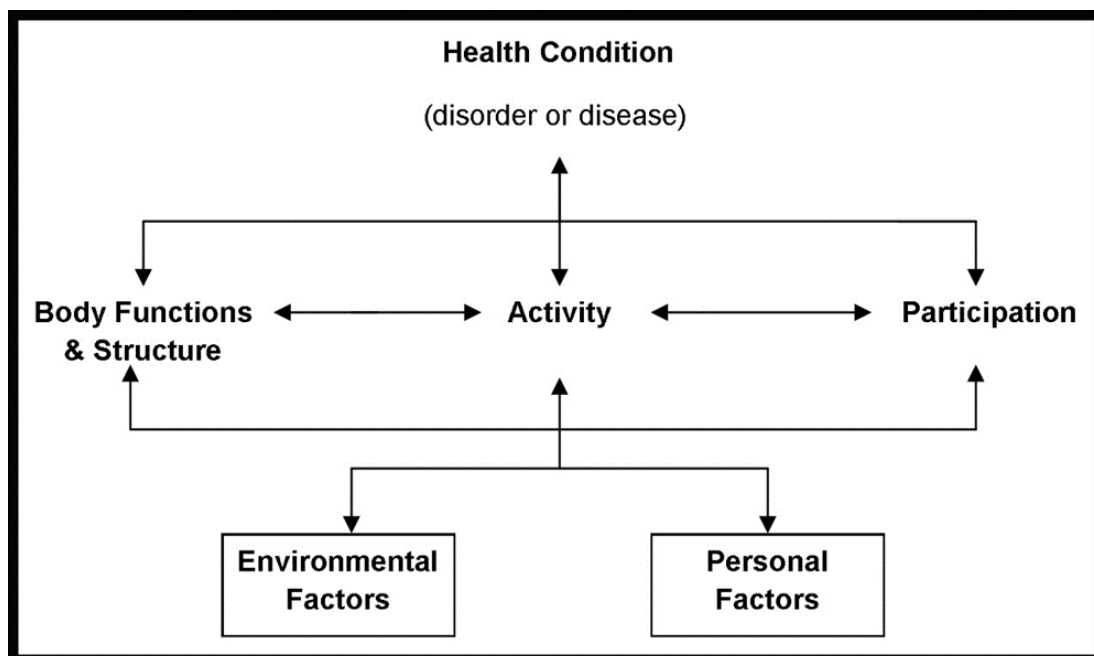


Figure 3. The ICF model (Stakes 2009)

6.2 Participation

ICF defines participation as “involvement in life situations”. According to the ICF, every action that is executed in a social environment can be considered participation. (WHO 2013, 35.) The environmental factors play an important role in regards of participation. The physical, social and attitudinal environment in which an individual lives can either act as a barrier or a facilitator of that individual’s functioning. (WHO 2001, 212-213.) Thus, the level of functioning of an individual may significantly change in different environments. The ICF helps to understand the importance of environment in participation, providing a guide in means of how the environment can be changed in order to improve the performance of an individual (WHO 2001, 15).

7 NORDIC NETWORK

The Nordic network was originally established in 2008 by Anders Midsundstad (Activity and participation for all, Norway), Martin Sandø (The Danish Ministry of Social Affairs) and Kristian Jensen (The Danish Disability Sport Information Centre). The network meetings have been organized annually since 2008. In total ten (10) meetings have been organized since then. Until 2017 the meetings were held in Nordic languages, in 2017 the meeting was carried out in English for the first time.

The focus of the network has mainly been on participation and inclusion, but the perspectives have broadened over time. The purpose of the network was originally to discover and develop the leisure time activities of people with disabilities in the Nordic countries, thereby promoting their inclusion. The idea was to share ideas and develop common projects by making use of the participants’ experience and expertise in the field.

The Nordic network is an open network; therefore, anyone can participate. People taking part in the meetings have been consultants from municipalities, professionals working with people with disabilities, as well as representatives of associations and sports federations. The network does not receive any funding; therefore, the

participants are responsible for covering expenses incurred from organizing the meetings.

8 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE THESIS

The aim of this thesis was to collect information concerning Nordic network by conducting a questionnaire. The objectives of the thesis included defining what is Nordic Network and for whom it is meant for, to find out how this network contributes to promoting adapted leisure time activities in the member countries, and to utilize the feedback received from participants in suggesting possible improvements in order to further develop this network.

8.1 Open access to different forms of physical activity in Satakunta (KAISLA) project

This thesis was implemented in cooperation with the accessibility research group of Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK), as a part of KAISLA-project. First part of the project launched in SAMK on April 7, 2016. The project was funded by SAMK and the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The main aim for the project was to promote equal participation in physical as well as other leisure time activities and experiences in Satakunta region, as well as to raise the awareness of accessibility. Furthermore, the purpose was to study the situation of open access physical activity in Satakunta region and to provide knowledge concerning organizing open access physical activity. The measures of action included piloting the VALTTI program in Satakunta, which aims to help children and youth find hobbies. VALTTI is a program of the Finnish Association of Persons with Disabilities (VAU), developed in an international SEDY-project. The idea of the program is to provide support and guidance for children and youth with special needs to help them find a suitable hobby. (Karinharju, Isberg, Inberg, Mäkelä & Törne 2017, 9-14; Website of the Finnish Association of Persons with Disabilities 2018.)

8.2 Thesis process

The thesis topic was suggested to me by SAMK's accessibility research group in fall 2017. The study plan for the bachelor thesis was presented and accepted in November 2017. Since the topic of the thesis was confirmed in short notice, the study plan was presented after taking part in the Nordic network conference. The agreement on the preparation of a thesis was signed after the study plan had been accepted, in February 2018.

The thesis process began with reviewing the theoretical background concerning the topic. Various sources of information were used to deepen the knowledge and acquire a comprehensive picture of the theoretical background. Keywords such as "adapted physical activity", "inclusion", "accessibility", "equality" were used in searching information. Collecting theoretical information and preparing the theoretical part started already in September 2017 and continued up until fall 2018.

The thesis process included a trip to Iceland to participate in Nordic network meeting 2017. The meeting was organized in Reykjavik 28th and 29th of September. There were representatives from 5 Nordic countries: Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland. The programme included presentations by the representatives of the member countries and visiting lecturers (APPENDIX 3). The conference was held in Hitt Húsið, a youth center in Reykjavik. Hitt Húsið was initiated in 1991 and the idea was to provide a recreational center in terms of art, culture and sports for young people. Hitt Húsið aims to offer guidance, support and facilities concerning leisure time and employment. The center offers after school leisure time activities for young people with disabilities. Moreover, there is a social program called Tipp Topp for disabled 16-40-year-olds taking place on a weekly basis. The facilities of Hitt Húsið can be rented by youth organizations for a reasonable fee. (Website of the Hitt Húsið 2018.)

Analyzing the questionnaire responses started in November 2017. A summary was made based on the answers to get a better perspective of the background of the participants and their expectations towards the network. Originally it was planned that the theoretical part of the thesis would have been finished in summer 2018. However,

the theoretical part was completed in fall 2018 just before finalizing and presenting the thesis.

9 METHOD

According to Creswell (2008, 18) certain research problems require specific approaches. If a phenomenon needs to be understood and little research has been done on it, qualitative approach is the most suitable to be used. Qualitative approach ought to be used in case the topic is new or has never been addressed with a certain sample group of people.

The research design and method of this thesis were selected based on the aim and objectives of the thesis. The design used in this thesis is a non-experimental research. A qualitative approach was chosen since the topic was new and there was no information on the topic to be used. Since the aim was to collect information about the Nordic network, the chosen type of research design is a survey and the method of data collection is a questionnaire. The questionnaire mostly included open-ended questions to get a more flexible response from the participants. However, there were also some closed ended questions included. Thus, the questionnaire was semi-structured. In the following chapter the thesis process will be discussed more in detail.

10 IMPLEMENTATION

The questionnaires were designed prior to participating the Nordic network conference in fall 2017. Two questionnaires were structured to address the organizers and participants. Both questionnaires included questions aiming to collect qualitative information and feedback from the respondents. The questionnaires were conducted with the guidance of SAMK's accessibility research group. The questionnaire templates were designed by using Microsoft Word format. Initially it was planned that the participants would have been interviewed during the conference by using the

questionnaire templates, but that was not possible since the program was not flexible enough. Consequently, it was decided that the questionnaires were sent to the participants via e-mail.

The questionnaire for the participants included questions concerning the background of the participants (country, occupational title, field of occupation). There were also questions concerning the organization, funding and availability of leisure time activities for the disabled in the represented countries. The participants were also asked about their expectations towards future events. The questionnaire included ten (10) questions in total. (APPENDIX 1) The questionnaire for the organizers included seven (7) questions concerning the history and the purpose of the Nordic network. The organizers were asked about the vision and expectations towards the network. Moreover, the organizers were asked how this network has improved inclusion and promoted APA so far. (APPENDIX 2)

The questionnaires were sent via e-mail on September 26 in total to 23 people participating in the conference (Finnish participants excluded). The mailing list did not include all the participants since there were also guest speakers who are not involved in the network on a regular basis. The participants had approximately 3 weeks' time to answer the questionnaires, and a reminder was sent on October 11.

11 RESULTS

In total eight (8) participants replied to the questionnaire: four (50%) people from Denmark, two (25%) people from Iceland, one (12,5%) person from Norway. Since the Swedish delegation of five people sent in one answer, they were counted as one (12,5%) person (Figure 4). Accordingly, the answer rate was 34,8%.

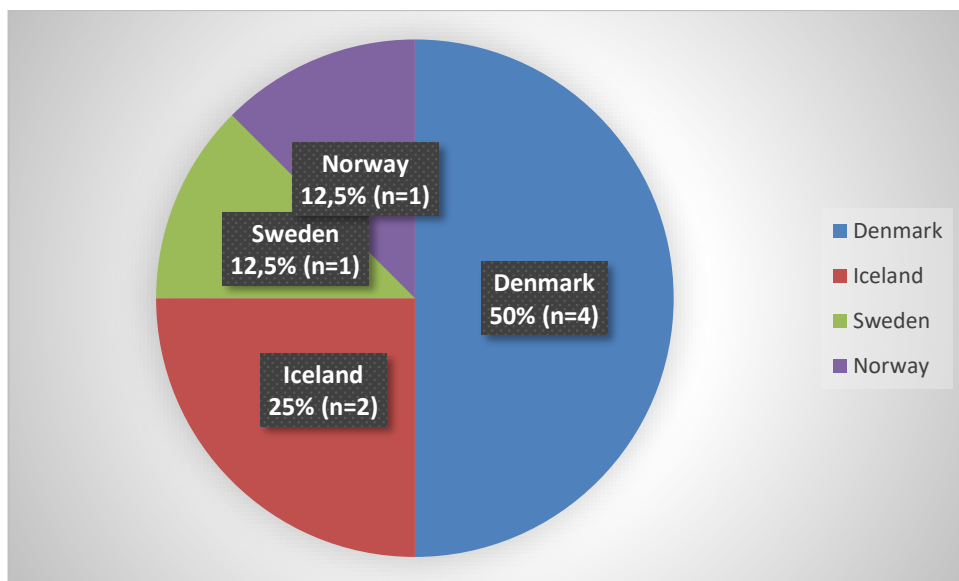


Figure 4. The distribution of countries (n=8)

All of the people answering to the questionnaire found participating in the network conference useful. The respondents emphasized the importance of making new contacts, sharing ideas and getting inspiration as well as receiving a broader perspective of the field in the Nordic countries. Five (62,5%) of the respondents had previously taken part in the conference.

The participants were asked about their occupational title as well as in which sector they are working in. Four (50%) of the respondents reported working in the public sector, one (12,5%) person only in the private sector, two (25%) people reported working in both, public and private sector, and one (12,5%) person reported working in public sector and NGOs (Figure 5).

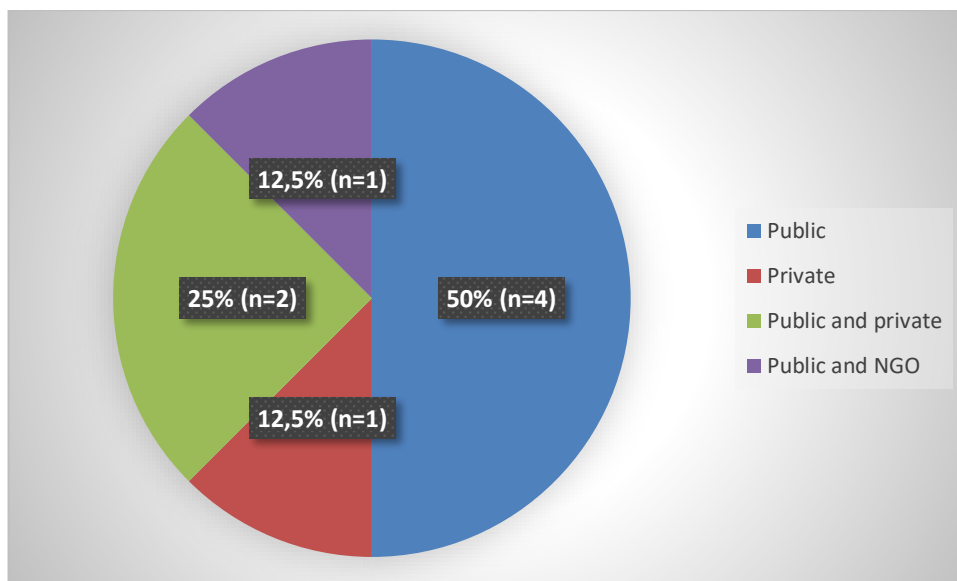


Figure 5. Represented economic sectors (n=8)

The participants reported receiving information concerning the network from their national networks' distribution lists, from other participants and organizers as well as from colleagues working in the field.

Two (25%) persons replied that the conference met the expectations, however it would have been nice to have more time for discussion and networking. One (12,5%) person found the information received in advance of the event insufficient and was in that sense disappointed. One (12,5%) person did not have specific expectations regarding the conference besides from meeting other people working in the same field. However, the presentations could have been better and in English. The Swedish delegation (12,5%) would like to develop common projects and cooperation. Furthermore, they would find it beneficial to include practical workshops and meeting the target group. One person (12,5%) found some presentations irrelevant. Moreover, the conference should be more structured including discussion based on the content of the presentations. Two people (25%) did not reply to the question regarding their expectations.

Most of the respondents understand the concept open access for all in a similar way. They emphasized the right to have equal opportunities to participate in the society, regardless of disabilities.

“I understand that everyone who has interest in the field, whether you work in the field, have a disability or you are a voluntary, you can participate. --- That way, the people involved will change.”

“Everyone may participate if they want, and everyone has access to what is interested in.”

“--- there must be the same rights for all, regardless of whether you are disabled or not.”

“I would define it as everybody should get the same opportunities, equal rights to do what they want to do.”

“Simply that everybody should have the right to have a leisure time activity, also persons with disability problems.”

“There should not be specially designed activities for the group of disabled people; they shall be integrated in ordinary activities.”

As emerged from the answers, the responsibility for organizing APA and leisure time activities lies on various actors of the field and it varies in different countries. In Norway responsibility lies mostly on municipalities. However, also various organizations and volunteers are needed since the municipalities often do not have the necessary resources. In Sweden APA is organized by a variety of organizations and NGOs in addition to the municipalities. Additionally, the private sector is involved in organizing APA. In Iceland APA is organized mostly by the state and local municipalities. Nevertheless, there are some private organizations, which receive financial support for their activity from the government. In turn in Denmark the picture is scattered. The respondents reported that there is no responsibility on the state and seldom on municipality level. APA is mostly organized by sports federations, leisure time organizations, but also by kindergartens and schools. Moreover, National Olympic Committee and Sports Confederation of Denmark (DIF) organizes physical activity for the disabled.

12 SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Based on the feedback received from the participants the following improvements would be suggested in order to further develop the network. Firstly, members of the network would benefit from defining a clear aim and future vision for the network. By doing so it would be easier to coordinate the activity of this network in the future and it would also clarify the aim for all the members. Secondly, creating a website/Facebook pages providing the basic information of the network would help to raise the awareness of the network, thereby helping to get new members. Thirdly, it would be necessary to structure the network by naming the persons who are in charge. Now the network is rather scattered, and it seems to be disorganized. Moreover, also the network meetings should have a clear structure, including practical workshops instead of just having presentations. There should be enough time reserved for networking in groups consisting of members from different countries. And lastly, it would be beneficial to incorporate universities from the member countries to develop the cooperation and create common projects.

13 DISCUSSION

The topic of this thesis was confirmed by SAMK's Accessibility Research Group in fall 2017. I had never participated in such an event before, so I did not know what to expect. The greatest challenge for the thesis was the lack of information concerning the network. It was difficult to design the questionnaires before participating in the conference without having sufficient background information of the network. Furthermore, there was little time prior to the conference to carefully prepare the questionnaires, which is also the biggest shortcoming of this thesis.

There were a few drawbacks that emerged during the thesis process. Since it was the first time the conference was held in English, there was a language barrier that may have affected the response rate of the questionnaires. Originally it was planned that I would have interviewed the participants by using the questionnaire templates. However, that did not work out since the program was rather compact and there was no time for interviews. Consequently, the questionnaires were sent via e-mail prior to

the conference as a Word document, since there was not enough time to conduct and test an electrical questionnaire. An electrical questionnaire (E-lomake) would have been more practical and it would have made it easier to analyse the answers. On the other hand, E-lomake could have been confusing since it might not be familiar to participants from other countries, which in turn could have affected the answer rate negatively.

The network conference is held in a different country each time and also the organizers change. Hence, conducting a separate questionnaire for the organizers did not work out as expected. Two of the network members eventually answered the questionnaire as they had been involved in this network since the beginning and they have also been actively involved in planning the conferences. The original founders of the network are no longer actively involved.

There were fairly few people taking part in the conference. The reason for that could be that the participants are responsible for covering the costs related to taking part in the conference. Another reason for low number of participants could be the lack of available information regarding this network. The network does not have a webpage, hence there is no information to be found on the internet. The program was sent to participants in advance, however the questionnaire answers revealed that the participants would have expected more information concerning the event in advance.

The thesis process began in fall 2017, however it should be mentioned that the process was on hold for a while because of scheduling difficulties. The aim was to finalize and present the thesis in November 2018. Finding the necessary time for finalizing the thesis was challenging because I had already started working full-time. Furthermore, since the writing process had stopped for a while, I had to review the material and familiarize myself to the topic once again.

All in all, the thesis process was extremely rewarding despite the difficulties. I had an opportunity to take part in the network conference held in Iceland and to meet people from various Nordic countries working with people with disabilities. It was interesting to listen to their presentations and to explore the situation of adapted leisure time activities in the Nordic countries. Since the next conference is held in Finland in 2019,

it was necessary to find out more about this network and to collect feedback concerning the expectations towards future events.

The focus of this thesis was mainly on defining what is the Nordic network. It would be necessary to further develop this network in order to improve the collaboration between the member countries and expand the network's perspectives. For further research I would therefore suggest developing projects concerning adapted leisure time activities to improve the cooperation between the member countries.

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QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE PARTICIPANTS

QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information from the participants of Nordic Network conference. The questionnaire is designed by a physiotherapy student from Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, Finland. The information gathered through this questionnaire will be used in the student's bachelor thesis.

Thank you for your answers!

1. Have you previously participated in the Nordic Network conference? If yes, have you found the conference useful and in which way?

2. What country are you from?

3. Your occupational title

4. Which field are you working in?

- a) Private sector
- b) Public sector
- c) Other, what?

5. Where did you receive information about the Nordic Network?

6. What were the expectations regarding the conference, did the event meet those expectations? If not, what was missing, what could have been done differently?

7. How do you understand the concept open access for everyone?

8. Who is responsible for organizing adapted physical activities in your country?

9. What kind of activities are there available for people with disabilities in your country?

10. What are your expectations towards future events? Could there be something included/excluded?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NETWORK

QUESTIONNAIRE

**The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information concerning the Nordic Network. The questionnaire is designed by a physiotherapy student from Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, Finland. The information gathered through this questionnaire will be used in the student's bachelor thesis.
Thank you for your answers!**

1. When was the Nordic Network founded, by whom?

2. For which purpose was it founded?

3. For whom is it meant for?

4. How do you see the future vision of Nordic Network? What would you like to achieve by being part of this Network?

5. Who is responsible for funding the Network?

6. How has the Network promoted adapted physical activity and improved inclusion during these years (projects, campaigns etc.)?

7. What are your expectations regarding future events?

PROGRAM OF THE CONFERENCE

Nordic Network: Leisure Activities for Everyone

Program – September 28th and 29th at Hitt Húsið, Reykjavík, Iceland.

Thursday

11:00 – 12:00 Registration and Reception (snacks and sandwiches available).

12:00 – 12:15 Opening Ceremonies.

12:15 – 14:00 Brief introduction from participants about their projects (5 projects).

1. Denmark 2. Norway 3. Sweden 4. Iceland 5. Finland

14:00 – 14:15 Break.

14:15 – 14:45 Ragnheiður Maísól Sturludóttir (Manager at Art Without Borders).

14:45 – 15:15 Project from Sweden (Peter).

15:15 – 15:30 Break.

15:30 – 16:10 Margrét Norðdahl (The Reykjavík School of Visual Arts).

16:30 – 17:45 Visit Reykjavík (walking tour) from Hitt Húsið with a guide.

19:00 Bus from Hitt Húsið to dinner (pickup for those not staying in Reykjavík).

19:30 Food and fun at Gufunesbær; beer-tasting, live music, three-course dinner with wine and loads of fun at an old barn in the suburb of Reykjavík.

Friday

09:00 – 09:40 Kristín Björnsdóttir (Associate Professor in Disability Studies at the University of Iceland).

09:40 – 10:15 Sports for people with mental illnesses (Lisbeth Crafuck).

10:15 – 10:25 Break.

10:25 – 11:00 Physical activity for fun (Annemarie and Elisabeth).

11:00 – 11:40 Project from Sweden (Peter).

11:40 – 12:00 Closing Ceremonies.

