1. Finland. Facts behind the long and complicated process of disability inclusion in sports

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1.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an in-depth view of the key disability sports organisations and their roles in the Finnish landscape. The Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM, Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö), which funds national sport policies, is the largest public organisation. Public and third sector organisations create policies and programmes which are then implemented together with several sports organisations and municipalities at different levels from local to national. The double strategy approach in sports services for persons with disabilities means keeping up traditional disability sports while working for and with increased inclusion in the mainstream setting. In many sports, disability sports are already integrated into National Sport Federations' (NSF) structures and policies. However, the level and broadness of this development varies, and the process towards inclusion is still ongoing.

1.2 Country profile

Characteristics of Finland

Finland is one of the Nordic countries representing the ideal type of Nordic welfare state. In a broad framework, Finland features the cornerstones of the Nordic model: equality and universality. In addition, the state has a strong role in organising social services and education. (Alestalo 2010.) Because of its history as part of the Swedish kingdom for approximately 700 years and the Grand Duchy of Russia for more than 100 years, it is different compared to other Nordic countries. Finland gained its full independence in 1917. Today the number of inhabitants is over 5.5 million.

The population density is low compared to other European countries. However, urbanisation is increasing and the population is centralised around the main cities. For example, more than 20% of the Finnish population live in the capital city Helsinki and its neighbourhood municipalities; the Helsinki urban area. Education, as well as children and adolescents, are at the core of the Finnish welfare state ethos. Finnish children and adolescents have been among the top scorers in the Programme for International Students Assessment, PISA, (OECD 2018), and the educational system has been seen as a Finnish export product (OKM, 2019). Moreover, Finland has the world's highest level of human capital, consisting of education and health, which is considered to be an important determinant of economic growth (Lim et al., 2018).

Table 1. Facts and statistics for Finland

Population (number of inhabitants)	5 518 000
Area (km2)	338 445
Density (inhabitants/km2)	18,1
Urbanisation rate (%)	85,4
Political organisation	Parliamentery democracy
Structure of the state	Unitary
Number of provinces	18
Number of municipalities	310
GDP per capita (US Dollars)	42 340
Number of official languages	2 (Finnish and Swedish)
EU Membership	1995
Welfare model	Nordic model

Sources: Tilastokeskus, 2019; Eurostat, 2017; Kuntaliitto, 2019

Sport in Finland

There are around 10,000 Finnish sports clubs and 69% of the population participates in sport at least once a week. The characteristics of the Nordic sport model typically include sports organisations based on volunteerism and democratic decision-making structures. Both the model and the whole sport system are different in Finland compared to the other Nordic countries (Lehtonen, 2017b; Lehtonen and Mäkinen, 2020). What sets Finland apart is that the state has a strong role as a coordinator of sport, especially in regard to funding. The state's sport budget consists of the revenues of the national lottery and betting proceeds. The total amount of the annual budget for sport is approximately 150 M€. The Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM) is responsible for administrating the distribution of subsidies for sports. However, because the sports organisations are also strongly involved in implementing sport policy, the Finnish system is regarded as a mixed model between state and sports organisations (Henry, 2009; Lehtonen and Mäkinen, 2020).

According to the Sports Act (390/2015), the municipalities are responsible but not forced to allocate institutional subsidies to mainstream sports clubs and other local-level associations. The number of sports clubs having grants from the municipalities is approximately 4,700 (Koski 2013), less than half of the total number of Finnish sports clubs.

During the past few years, the governance model of the Finnish sport system has been under construction and several national-level non-governmental organisations have been unified. These structural changes have been the major sport policy issue of the 2010s (Lehtonen 2017a). The High Performance Unit (HUY, Huippu-urheiluyksikkö) was established within the Finnish Olympic Committee (OK, Olympiakomitea) in 2013, and five years later the whole organisation was re-organised. The idealistic proposal has been to move towards a centralised, non-governmental structure and to merge both sport for all and elite sport actions into the agenda of one organisation, namely the Olympic Committee (Mäkinen et al., 2019). Along with these structural changes during the 2010s, disability sports federations also re-organised themselves (see Section 1.3 The disability sport system).

At the governmental level, the new governing model is based on networks of national policy programmes aiming to increase physical activity at the local level. Because education as well as children and youth, have been the main ethos of the Finnish welfare state, policy programmes have also mainly focused on school environments and local policy network practices. One of these programmes is Finnish Schools on the Move, the main aim of which is to increase pupils' physical activity during their school days and develop a more active and pleasant overall operating culture in comprehensive schools. (Lehtonen & Laine 2020.) By doing this, across the wider spectrum, the sport system has adopted forms and mechanisms of New Public Governance, which is the current paradigm in public sector administration (cf. Grix and Phillpots, 2011; Lehtonen, 2017a; Lehtonen and Laine, 2020).

Table 2. Sport profile of Finland

Government authority responsible for sport	Ministry of Education and Culture
Membership sport club (% of population)	13
Membership fitness or health centre (% of population)	14
Membership socio-cultural club that includes sport in its activities (e.g. employees' club, youth club, school- and university related club) (% of population)	6
Sport participation, at least once a week (% of population)	69
Number of national sport federations	70
Number of sport clubs	10 000
Number of sport club members	1,1 million
National budget for sport (€ x 1.000.000)	167
National budget for sport federations (€ x 1000)	22 686
Local budget for sport (€ x 1.000.000)	730
Share of economic value of volunteers in sport in the GDP (%)	0,5-1,0

Sources: EC, 2018; OKM, 2018; Mäkinen et al., 2015; EC, 2010

Disability in Finland

Finnish disability politics aims to define disability as a condition which forms in interaction between the individual and obstacles in society. This is an ongoing process from medical model thinking towards social model and human rights practices, and it changes the way of portraying and defining disability, with consequences in both terminology and data collection. However, person-first language translates poorly into Finnish, causing long, complicated or, in the context of physical activity, even paradoxical concepts, such as ‘a person with an impairment of movement in moving’. Consequently, concepts such as disability sport and disabled athletes or participants are still used parallel to ‘parasport’ and respectively ‘para-athlete’.

Table 3. Changes of disability sports terminology from 1980 until today, from Finnish to English.

1980	Today
Invalidi/vammainen *[invalid/ handicapped/disabled]*	Henkilö, jolla on ~ vamma *[Person with a disability]*
Vammainen/pitkäaikaissairas *[Disabled/ long term ill]*	Henkilö, jolla on liikkumisen tai toimimisen rajoite/toimintarajoitteinen henkilö *[Person with an activity or mobility impairment]*
Vammainen lapsi/oppilas *[Disabled children, pupil]*	Erityistä tukea tarvitseva lapsi/oppilas *[Children/pupil with special needs]*
Vammaisurheilu *[Disability sports]*	Vammaisurheilu/paraurheilu *[Disability sports/parasports]*
Vammaisurheilija *[Disabled athlete/Athlete with a disability]*	Vammaisurheilija/paraurheilija/Special Olympics-urheilija/elinsiirtourheilija *[Athlete with a disability/para-athlete, Special Olympics -athlete, athlete with transplantation]*
Erityisryhmien liikunta *[Physical activity for special groups]*	Soveltava liikunta *[Adapted physical activity]*
Erityisryhmäläinen, erityisliikkuja *[Special person]*	Erityisryhmiin kuuluva henkilö *[Adaptive participant]*

Sources: Saari 2011b

The National Institute of Health and Welfare (THL) has responsibility to collect data related to disability. THL mainly relies on registers and population surveys as its key data resources. Concerning disability statistics, the trend is to approach disability from the perspective of reduced functional capacity. Population surveys use a battery of questions based on the ICF Framework (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health) created by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics[1]. Questions about functional capacity also make it possible to identify persons who experience different limitations and compare their situation with the rest of the population. (Nurmi-Koikkalainen et al., 2020.)

The most reliable data on the prevalence of disabilities of Finnish citizens comes from the FinSote study (see Table 4). Approximately half a million Finns (14%) are estimated to have severe difficulties in seeing, hearing, moving or cognition (Sainio et al. 2018).

Table 4. Statistics on activity limitation (disability) in Finland, % of population, 20 years or older, based on FinSote 2017-2018 (n=26 405).

1. Difficulty[1] to walk half a km (mobility impairment)	5.8
2. Difficulty[1] to read the text in the newspaper (seeing impairment)	2.2
3. Difficulty[1] to hear a conversation between several persons (hearing impairment)	2.8
4. Difficulty[2] in remembering	2.8
5. Difficulty[2] to concentrate	4
6. Difficulty[2] to learn	4.8
Any activity limitation (disability), 1-6	**13.7**

[1] Self-evaluation: major difficulty, cannot do at all, [2] Self-evaluation: poor or very poor

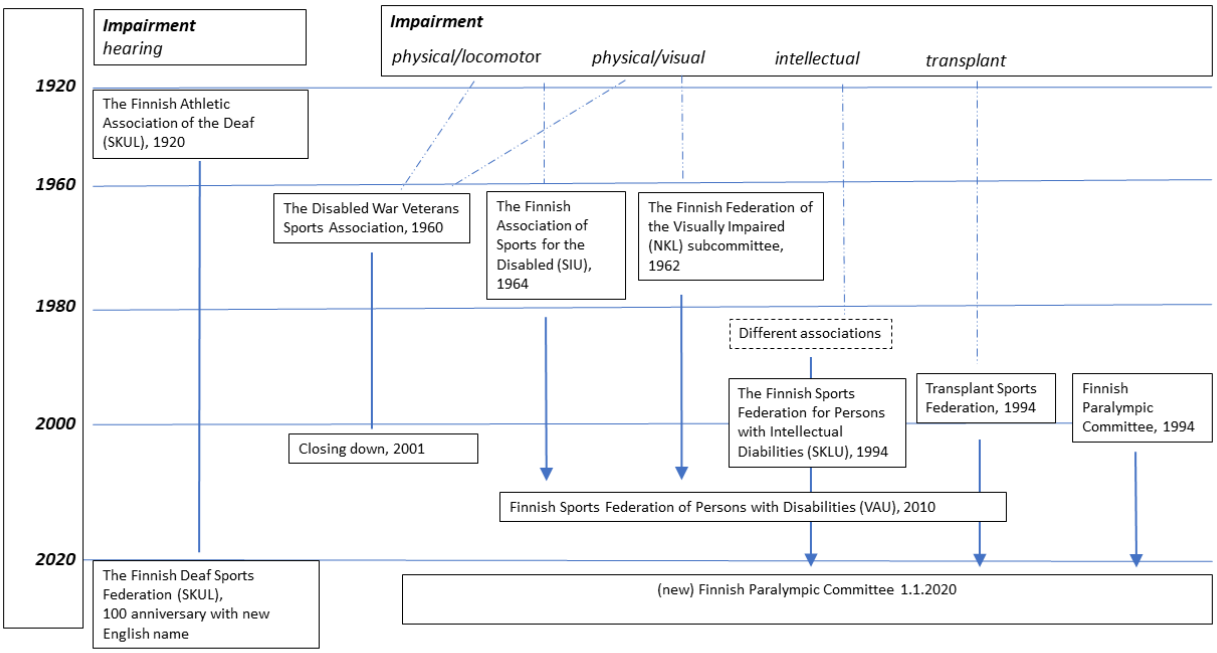
Source: Sainio et al. 2018

[1] The Washington Group on Disability Statistics is working under the auspices of the UN Statistical Commission. The main purpose of the WG is the promotion and coordination of international cooperation in generating statistics on disability suitable for censuses and national surveys. Its major objective is to provide basic information on disability that is comparable worldwide.

Emergence of disability sport in Finland

The history of disability sports in Finland can be divided into four phases of development: the early stage (1920–1960), the period of organisational development (1960–1980), the period of stabilisation (1980–2000) and the new millennium with increased integration from 2000 until today (Kummu, 2007; Saari & Kummu, 2009). Figure 1 summarizes these phases from the viewpoint of sports associations for persons with disabilities.

Figure 1. The birth and re-structure of various disability sports associations in Finland.



The Finnish Deaf Sports Federation (SKUL, Suomen Kuurojen Urheiluliitto, earlier: The Finnish Athletic Association of the Deaf) was established in 1920. Sports activities for people injured in war (earlier: war invalids and the war blind) started soon after the Second World War in the late 1940s. Disability sports were practised on a modest scale, mostly under the purview of rehabilitation institutes and disability organisations.

In the 1960s, the government started to support disability sport through subsidies. As a consequence, several disability-specific sports federations were established: in 1960 the Disabled War Veterans Sports Association (Sotainvalidien Urheiluliitto), in 1962 a sports committee under the Federation of the Visually Impaired (NKL, Näkövammaisten Keskusliitto), and in 1964 the Finnish Association of Sports for the Disabled (SIU, Suomen Invalidien Urheiluliitto). The latter took responsibility for coordinating Paralympic activities. Sports for persons with intellectual disability started under the Association for Intellectual Disabilities (KVL) at the late 1960s. (Kummu, 2007; Myllykoski & Vasara, 1989.)

Finland got its first Sports Act in 1980. The law gave disability sports more equal status in Finnish physical culture. Promotion of adapted physical activity and provision of accessible sporting facilities became part of welfare state policy. Several new organisations were established in 1994, such as The Finnish Paralympic Society (today: Finnish Paralympic Committee), the Finnish Adapted Physical Activity Federation (SoveLi) and the Transplant Sports Federation. Moreover, sports activities for people with intellectual disabilities were united under a new organisation in 1994, the Finnish Association of Sports for Intellectual Disabilities

(SKLU, Suomen Kehitysvammaisten Liikunta ja Urheilu), which also took responsibility for the newly launched Special Olympics activity. (Kummu, 2007; Saari & Kummu, 2009.)

The new era started at the beginning of the millennium. Co-operation between national disability-specific sports federations become stronger. In 2010, the national disability sports federations for persons with physical disabilities (SIU and NKL), intellectual disabilities (SKLU), and transplants merged under a new umbrella federation, the Finnish Sports Federation of Persons with Disabilities (VAU, Suomen Vammaisurheilu ja -liikunta). It took another ten years until the next step, namely the unification of the VAU and the (old) Finnish Paralympic Committee on 1 January 2020. Today the new Paralympic Committee is the largest non-governmental disability sports organisation in Finland. It has more than 20 employees, and 203 local disability associations, 61 local sports clubs and 17 Paralympic sports governing NSFs as members.

Since the millennium there has been much effort and progress made towards inclusion. The popularity of Paralympic sports has grown hand in hand with increased visibility and success. Since 1999, elite athletes with a disability have been given athlete grants. Disability sport integration process started in 2002 (see: Level of inclusion). The Finnish broadcasting company YLE started to invest in promoting the visibility of disability sports in the beginning of 2000s. In terms of increased cooperation, the Espoo 2005 Athletics Open European Championships organised in connection with a major mainstream sports event, the World Athletics Championships in Helsinki, was the national turning point. The election of wheelchair racer Leo-Pekka Tähti as Athlete of The Year 2016 was an important sign of equal recognition of elite athletes with a disability.

1.3 The disability sport system

Structure of disability sports

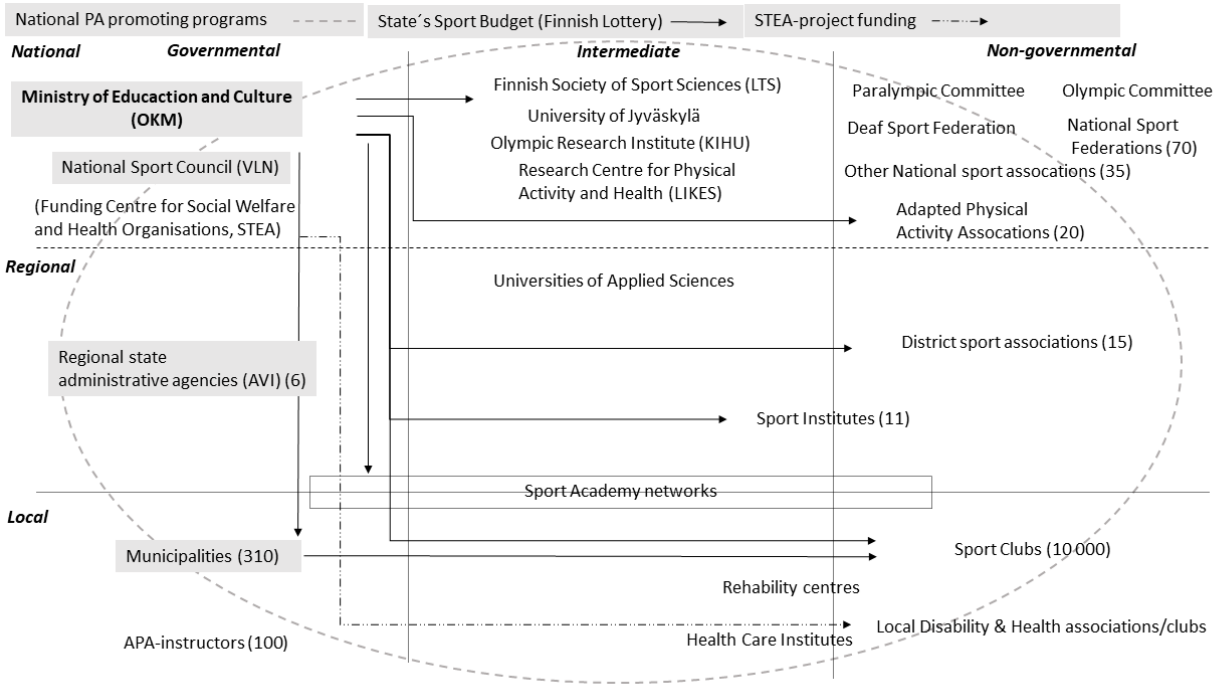


Figure 2. The structure of the Finnish disability sports landscape. Meaning of arrows are showing financial relationships.

Governmental agents

The structure of the Finnish disability sport system consists of several independent actors from different societal sectors. However, as described in Section 1.2., the state has a guiding role. At the national level, the OKM (Ministry of Education and Culture) guides sport policy, its legislation and financing and sports facility construction. The National Sports Council (VLN, Valtion liikuntaneuvosto) is a panel of experts assisting the ministry. The council is politically elected and appointed by the government for the duration of the parliamentary term. It is called upon to address major issues related to sports and physical activity and, in particular, evaluate the impact of the government's actions in the field of sports and physical activity. The council´s three sections are supposed to handle issues related to adapted physical activity and disability sport, but usually these issues belong to the Section for Non-discrimination, Equality and Sustainable Development.

The regional state administrative agencies distribute some of the subsidies and act as links between national and local-level sport policy practices. At the local level, 310 municipalities offer sports services for their residents, including people with disabilities. Within the municipalities there are approximately 100 adapted physical activity (APA) instructors, who organise local health-enhancing APA services for residents. This unique Finnish system is a result of various developmental steps, such as the successful development projects of the Finnish Society of Sports Sciences (LTS, Liikuntatieteellinen Seura), starting in the late 1960s, which led to the establishment of the first APA Committee in the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1980-1981. The ministry drafted an amendment to the Sports Act in 1983, according to which municipalities with populations of over 10,000 may hire an APA instructor subsidised by the government. The guiding idea was that APA instructors provided by the local sport system would supplement the supply of disability sports federations. Today they are financed by the municipalities and serve as important links between the public and the voluntary field, as well as between disability-specific and mainstream services. (Kaurala & Väärälä, 2010.) The network of municipal APA instructors is coordinated by the Paralympic Committee.

Intermediate agents

The Finnish Society of Sports Sciences (LTS) has an important role between the ministry, federations, municipalities and universities. The LTS organised the first APA seminar in 1969. A national APA congress has been organised every four years since 1986. By maintaining APA networks, collecting national recommendations on APA and organising nationwide APA seminars, it offers meeting places and development platforms for researchers and professionals. The LTS also keeps up an English website on APA (LTS 2020).

The University of Jyväskylä, other universities of applied sciences and vocational institutes from the fields of health, sports, leisure and rehabilitation are part of the APA networks. In most universities, APA content is embedded in universities' curricula both in theory and practice. For instance, since 2016, over 1,200 students all over Finland have received study credits by acting as personal buddies (PAPAI) for children and youths with a disability, assisting them in finding a sporting hobby (Paralympiakomitea 2020a).

From the elite sport perspective, sport academy networks at the local, regional and intermediate levels cross-cut the sectors from governmental to non-governmental. Academies consist of a diverse group of actors such as municipalities, sports clubs, sports institutes, sports federations and schools. Currently there are 21 academies across Finland promoting goal-oriented training and studying for young athletes, including para-athletes. There are 86 para-athletes at sports academies and the number is rising (Paananen 2020).

In the area of research, the KIHU Olympic Research Institute and LIKES Research Centre for Physical Activity and Health are the most important actors. The former is focused on elite sports research including para-athletes. Their contribution to Paralympic sport lies mainly in performing physiological tests and a few development projects. LIKES focuses on a physically active life. It conducts and publishes research, provides expert information for decision-making and coordinates development projects and large national action programmes, such as School on the Move.

Non-governmental agents

The Olympic Committee (OK, Olympiakomitea) currently has no activities around people with a disability. However, its High Performance Unit is responsible of selection of, and sending the team to the Paralympics. Other non-governmental actors that provide sports for people with a disability include the National Sports Federations (NSF) (70), other National Sports Associations (35) and Sports District Organisations (15) (see: Level of inclusion).

The Paralympic Committee and the Finnish Deaf Sports Federation (SKUL, Suomen Kuurojen Urheiluliitto) have the traditional role of organising and governing sports, physical activity and recreation for their members. They are members of the OK, but still independent, and get their funding directly from the ministry in the same way as other sports organisations. The 100-year-old SKUL is responsible for the sport and physical activity of the deaf and hearing-impaired persons with its 13 member clubs. Until recently deaf sports have not been actively involved in disability sports integration processes. After moving to same office infrastructure in 2018 co-operation between Olympic Committee, Paralympic Committee and NSFs has increased.

Since the merger of the VAU and National Paralympic Committee in the beginning of January 2020 (See 1.3. Emergence of disability sport in Finland), the new Paralympic Committee is responsible for the sporting and physical activity of people with physical, visual and intellectual impairments and those who have undergone organ transplantation or are in dialysis treatment. It also serves as the national sports federation for disability-specific sports (goalball, boccia, wheelchair rugby and showdown) and for disability sports which have not yet been integrated, such as chess and shooting for the visually impaired, para ice hockey, electric wheelchair hockey, para powerlifting and seven-a-side soccer. Special Olympics Finland is also under the Paralympic Committee's umbrella. The Paralympic Committee runs several recreation and leisure projects and programmes. For instance, there are five regional centres renting adaptive equipment and various accessibility and outdoor programmes (Paralympiakomitea 2020d.)

Approximately 1,000-1500 mainstream sports clubs organise activities for persons with disabilities, which represents 10-15% of the total number of Finnish sports clubs (Saari, 2015b). In addition, there is a large number (around 1,500) of disability-specific local clubs and non-profit associations which have a dual role as disability policy advocates and promoters of health-enhancing physical activity for their members. Most of these national non-profit associations are members of the Finnish Adapted Physical Activity Federation (SoveLi). SoveLi promotes health-enhancing physical activity with its 20 member organisations and their local member clubs (approximately 1,000) in the field of public health, disability and physical activity.

There are 11 sports institutes (training centres), all of which have services for people with disabilities. In addition, approximately five institutes have more specific training programmes or they organise events for athletes with disabilities. For instance, the Pajulahti Sports Institute serves as the Olympic and Paralympic training centre, Vuokatti Sports Institute has organised several international games in paraskiing and Kisakallio Sport Institute in some team sports, such as paracurling.

Steering of disability sport

Legislative framework

The Finnish Constitution (731/1999) is the basis of all legislation and exercise of government power. It details the fundamental rules, values and principles of Finnish democracy. The Sports Act (390/2015), the Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986, amendments 915/2016), and the Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014) state that everyone is equally entitled to participate in sports and physical activity at all levels and chosen roles. Moreover, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which was ratified in Finland in 2016 (2016), and especially its Article 30, stresses the importance of choice. The Land Use and Building Act (132/1999, amendment 222/2003) and the government regulation on accessibility (241/2017) give guidelines for building accessible sports facilities. The greatest challenge is provided by the old Disability Services and Assistance Act (380/1987) which regulates transportation, personal assistance and special aids. The new Disability Services Act enters into force in 2023, but the application practices of the new Act will be established no sooner than 2025 (Nurmi-Koikkalainen et al., 2020).

Policy framework

Disability sport has developed hand-in-hand with adapted physical activity (APA) policies and practices. APA is an academic field of study, a profession (see 1.3. Governmental agents) and a service delivery or adapted activities for persons with disabilities or hindrances in participation. Disability sport refers to sport designed for, and practiced by people or athletes with disabilities. Inclusion policy adopted by disability sport federations has brought these two fields together.

The Sports Act, and its amendments in 1984, was a turning point for disability sport and APA (Kaurala & Väärälä, 2010) (see: Governmental and intermediate agents). In current state policy, inclusion is both the goal and means for the health and wellbeing of the population. Consequently, sport and physical activity are seen as tools to strengthen civil society and inclusion. Provision of equal access to sport for people with disabilities is a crucial part of the policy objectives and programmes of the VLN. However, the disability movement has had only little interest in sports and physical activity. For instance, in the Finnish Disability Forum's survey for the CRPD parallel report (Vesala & Vartio, 2019), access to sports and physical activity plays only a small role.

Financial, governance and managerial support

Financial framework

The responsible administrator of disability sport on the governmental level is the OKM, Ministry of Education and Culture. It is in charge of distributing the state's sport subsidies to all national-level sports associations, including the Paralympic Committee, district sports associations, sports institutes and sports academies. The only notable exception is the High Performance Unit, which forwards some state´s subsidies directly to NSFs for the development of elite Paralympic sports. During recent years, the total amount of these subsidies has been around 5-6 million euros annually. In 2020 almost €400,000 was targeted at elite Paralympic sports (Olympiakomitea 2020).

In 2020, the amount of institutional subsidies to perform basic tasks for non-governmental national actors such as sports associations organising activities around disability sport or APA was €2.9 million. There is no follow-up on the financial value of disability sports-related work in national sports federations, but some estimations can be given. In 2013 (Saari 2015a), 28 mainstream sports federations (out of 70) provided information on working months consumed for disability sports, the value of this being approximately €400,000. Today the value of the disability sport-related work of national sports federations is probably closer to one million euro, but no facts are available.

The financial value of APA or disability sport in non-governmental local-level organisations, such as mainstream sports clubs and public health associations, is even harder to estimate, because they are subsidised directly from the municipalities and may also receive money from other sources such as the ministry, the EU and companies. Since 2013, OKM has allocated project subsidies for local sports clubs' various development projects of approximately €3-5 million, for 300-400 sports clubs annually. In 2019, 25% of them reported disability sport as one of their development targets (Oja et al., 2020). Municipalities also organise APA resources by themselves. In 2017, municipalities targeted resources for APA of between 8-9.5 million euro (Ala-Vähälä 2018).

Local practitioners, coaches and persons with a disability can apply for grants from private foundations administrated by the Paralympic Committee or other disability organisations (Paralympiakomitea 2020c). The purpose of these grants is to support persons with disabilities in participating in conferences and sports-related visiting tours, as well starting a hobby. However, the economic value of this is small, approximately €150,000 per year.

Governance and management support

When a mainstream sports federation, sports club or other service provider takes over responsibility for disability sport or launches new services for persons with a disability, they often need support. The Paralympic Committee organises grassroots events and try-out programmes which serve as platforms for NSFs to present their sports and meet persons with disabilities. In addition, personnel from the Paralympic Committee act as inclusion consultants on accessibility, adaptive equipment, equality and non-discrimination planning, classification knowhow, competition arrangements and other disability-specific issues. Moreover, web training in APA and disability sport is open to all ad free of charge (Paralympiakomitea 2020e).

Level of inclusion

In this paper the concept of integration refers to the disability sport integration process and transfer of disability sports, athletes with disabilities and programs into mainstream sport federations. Inclusion is the

ultimate goal of these actions and processes and it refers to equal participation opportunities, sense of belonging and being welcomed.

There were two kinds of projects, financed by the OKM: those which had elite-level parasports transfer into the mainstream federation as the goal (integration), and those that worked on wider inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities. An example of the former was the Finnish Paralympic Committee's integration project during 2005-2007 and of the latter, the Sports for All Children project (2002−2008), which focused on developing inclusive training for instructors and coaches which was further developed in the Open for All Sports programme (2006−2010). (Saari 2015a.)

The status of the inclusion of NSFs have been evaluated three times since 2011. In 2011, out of 12 NSFs which were in charge of Paralympic sports, many reported success in competitions, but challenges in finance and attitudes. They also reported a lack of support for local sports clubs and problems in the recruitment of new athletes. (Saari 2011a.) In 2014, out of 70 respondents 38 NSFs had at least some responsibility for disability sports, but there was varied commitment, magnitude and dimensions. Some prioritised elite-level Paralympians and were not keen on taking full responsibility, whilst others tried to cover the whole spectrum from grassroots and recreation to Special Olympics and elite-level parasports. The most successful NSFs have a long history with persons with disabilities. For instance judo and equestrian sports have worked with athletes with disability since the 1980s. The swimming federation took responsibility for disability swimming (today: paraswimming) among the first sports federations in the early 2000s. (Saari 2015a.)

The inclusion development received an extra boost in 2015, when the OKM ordered a prerequisite to have equality and non-discrimination strategy documents before being given funding. These strategy documents were collected and analysed in 2018 from a disability sports perspective. Out of 117 documents the majority (86%) mentioned the word disability, disability sports or adapted physical activity, and 84% of documents had concrete plans, programmes or practices, such as accessibility improvements or special programmes for persons with disabilities. Only a small minority (13%) seemed to realise that equal opportunities in sports means equality not only as a participant or an athlete, but also as a coach or an employee. (Saari & Sipilä, 2018.)

Local level surveys for sport clubs show a slight increase in disability sport or inclusive activities. In 2014 (Saari 2015b), out of 326 respondents 160 (49%) reported having one or more members with a disability, in a total of 41 sports. In a recent survey with 334 respondents the number was 177 (62%) (Saari 2020). In the Paralympic Committee's sports-finder website called Löydä oma seura, which is a platform for sports clubs and other sports providers has 440 advertisers (Paralympiakomitea, 2020b.) Number of sport clubs which organise disability sport or adapted activities is expected to increase with help of the newly launched Avoimet ovet [Open doors] project, which will focus on consulting sports clubs with special issues connected to persons with disabilities' participation in sports.

Barriers and facilitators of the disability sport system and policy

The independency of actors working in different sectors in the Finnish sport system is a complex question in the frame of system and policy practices. The OKM, which is in charge of funding sports, has not felt the need to create common strategic goals for disability sport and APA, nor to progressively steer the development of inclusion. However, the mixed system has given OKM the opportunity to launch new policy programmes, for example, for schools, and in that way act over the national sports federations. Therefore, the system based on networks and the mixed sport model is flexible and able to better modify its practices and take in the divergent actors which are needed to improve disability sports practices and policies (cf. Lehtonen & Laine, 2020).

At the moment Finland is developing the production of welfare state services such as education and social and health care as a response to growing expenses. Annual social and health care expenses represent more than 47% of municipalities' overall expenses (Kuntaliitto 2019). Moreover, Finland is ageing rapidly, and, as we know, the risk for disabilities grows with age. According to predictions by Finnish Statistics (Tilastokeskus 2020) it is estimated that 40.2% of the population over 64 years old will be living in sparsely populated municipalities where the population number is under 2,000 in 2040 compared to cities and urban areas (population over 100,000), where the share of the population over 64 years will be only 22%. Many of these ageing and sparsely populated municipalities are located in rural areas. This geographical and age group-based polarisation challenges smaller municipalities' capacity to offer equal services for people with

disabilities. In addition, most development projects in APA take place in the largest municipalities (Rikala 2015). Thus, some policy actions have stimulated geographical polarisation and also inequality for people with disabilities.

One local-level barrier is also the strong autonomy of municipalities. For example, the Sports Act gives Finnish sport its overall framework including equality and non-discrimination, but the law is non-compulsory. This gives municipalities a great deal of freedom when discussing the implementation of the Sports Act. Consequently, persons with disabilities and their sports services are often deprioritised in those municipalities which suffer from ageing and economic problems.

To provide opportunities for persons with disabilities local sport clubs need more trained coaches and instructors, financial support and consultation (Saari 2015b). Many of the municipals´ APA instructors are retiring and their vacancies are often merged into broader fields of health and welfare, which leaves less time for matters of sport and adapted physical activity. Moreover, climate change is setting new challenges for winter sports and Finland's long geographic distances set difficulties. If a person has a disability, commuting is hardly ever a true option.

From the viewpoint of governance, legislation is one of the most important facilitators in disability sports (see Section 1.3). For instance, the revision of Sports Act in 2015 contains more equality aspects than ever before. In addition, the Non-discrimination Act (2015) and the Act of Equality between Men and Women (2016) made OKM emphasise these aspects more broadly in sport policy (See: Level of integration and inclusion). The emphasis on equal access has had practical implications also in those guidelines concerning sports facilities. State subsidies are granted only if accessibility is taken into consideration. This means that an accessibility audit must be conducted in project applications that handle the rebuilding of old facilities. In cases of new building construction projects, an accessibility evaluation document has to be provided. (Valtion liikuntaneuvosto 2014.) Guidebooks and knowhow are available for architects and facility constructors, such as those on accessible indoor sports facilities (Kilpelä & VAU, 2013). In addition, the ratification of CRPD in 2016 has given OKM responsibility for following the implementation of the convention in sports and physical activity which, in turn, may in the future result in more equal services for persons with disability.

At a practical level, the Finnish sport system benefits from the nation's small size, long APA history and high-quality university and vocational education for future professionals. Finnish APA professionals are well-connected both nationally and internationally. They keenly follow new innovations and openly share their ideas. Persons with disabilities are represented in most committees and programmes. The ministry's financing system is stable and the general guidelines for various beneficiaries are relatively transparent.

The success and visibility of Paralympic athletes has had a huge impact on public and media attitudes towards parasport and also disability sport in general. Increased visibility has made parasport more appealing to co-operation partners and sponsors. Interest in other disability sports movements, such as the Special Olympics, has also grown.

1.4 Sport participation by people with disabilities

Monitoring and evaluation

The VLN has the obligation to supervise and evaluate the success of sport policy and the impact of the government's actions in the field of sports and physical activity. In addition, the CRPD Article 31–Statistics and data collection states that parties should undertake to collect appropriate information, including statistical data, concerning the participation of persons with disabilities.

The VLN has, for instance, published a report on National Sport Federation's status on disability sports and adapted physical activity (Saari 2015a) (see: Level of integration and inclusion) and a status report on the state's role in the promotion of disability sport and APA (Pyykkönen & Rikala, 2018). In addition, the VLN has published a report every four years since 2000 following the development of APA in municipalities, which shows that municipalities are the largest service provider of APA (Ala-Vähälä 2018). The number of APA groups organised by municipalities is some 10,000–12,000 per year, with approximately 150,000

individual participants. The VLN reports have been used to give guidance on the state's sports strategy and financing policy.

Surveys and studies related to the sports participation of Finnish persons with disabilities are scarce. However, Finland's first initial report on the implementation of the CRPD published by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 2019 has a short summary of the OKM's actions towards increased participation of persons with disabilities in recreation, leisure and sport (pages 61–62). Moreover, the Finnish Disability Forum is preparing a parallel report for the United Nations about the CRPD's implementation and how it has affected the lives of persons with disabilities. The parallel report is based on a survey in 2018, targeted at persons with disabilities and conducted in co-operation with the Human Rights Centre and disability federations (Vesala & Vartio, 2019). The report is due to be published in 2020.

One problem in data collection is the ambiguous and changing rhetoric around the key concepts, such as disability, integration and inclusion. Various actors may have different understandings of inclusion, or, with the intention of being inclusive, they may forget to operationalise it from the point of view of persons with disabilities. For instance, in the large-scale state-led Finnish Schools on the Move programme the main concepts were the 'equality' and 'involvement' of all pupils. When the programme was later evaluated, the data did not give an opportunity to evaluate how pupils with disabilities were involved in programmes compared to other pupils or their physical activity levels before or after the programme (Valtion liikuntaneuvosto 2019).

In specific disability sport programmes, operationalisation of the inclusion concept can be even more complicated. For some, inclusion is getting into traditional disability-focused activities, separate services and maintaining special knowhow owned by the minority in question, whilst for others it is a process having access to the mainstream, and abandoning disability-focused services and stigmatising labels. It can be both, as stated in the CRPD Article 30. The dual approach (see Saari, 2015a, 2011b; Pyykkönen & Rikala, 2018) respects the processual nature of inclusion and the voices of persons with disabilities and, consequently, may provide more in-depth information to be used in sport policy and programming.

Sport participation

There is practically no data on the participation levels in sports of Finnish adults with disabilities. Most surveys and studies related to the sports participation of persons with disabilities focus on children and adolescents. The LIITU survey (2019) is a regular survey of children and young people aged 7-15. Data collection is undertaken every second year and disability is studied through the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG). In 2018, the size of the sample was 7,132 (72% response rate). Disability is linked to lower physical activity and participation levels. Children and young people with disabilities are less likely to engage in the recommended amount of physical activity than others. Compared to non-disabled pupils, pupils with disabilities are less active during outside recess, far less likely to take part in organised sports activities and less likely to keep to the recommended two-hour limit for daily screen time. Young people aged 11-15 with disabilities participate in sports club activities less (45%) than their able-bodied peers (61%).

The School Health Promotion study (SHP) of Finnish adolescents was a large study of 14–19-year-olds in 2017. In Ng, Sainio & Sit's (2019) report, the data were grouped into physiological and cognitive disabilities through the WG disability statistics and split into active and inactive adolescents based on the PA's recommendations. Approximately 10% of males (n = 6,385) and 17% of females (n = 11,107) reported at least one functional difficulty, and the estimated prevalence of disability among adolescents between 14–19 years old in Finland was 13.5%. Fewer adolescents with disabilities took part in daily PA, especially among those with cognitive disabilities. Males were typically more physically active than females and the levels of PA fell more sharply between the ages of 11 and 16 years among females compared to males. There were fewer active adolescents with walking difficulties, memory difficulties, learning difficulties, concentrating difficulties or general cognitive difficulties than their peers without disabilities. The degree of lowered PA varies depending on functional disabilities, with adolescents with walking difficulties the least active.

The Youth Leisure Time study is regularly repeatable and targeted at children and young people aged 7-29. Children and young people with disabilities was an extra thematic part of the survey in 2019 (Hakanen, Myllyniemi & Salasuo, 2019). The age group in the detached sample was 7–17, but the size of the sample small (n=164). According to the report, 45% of children and youths without disability (age 7–17 years) are physically active for at least 60 minutes per day every weekday. Among children and youths with disabilities it is only 21%. Boys with disabilities are more physically active (49%) than girls (31%). Physical activity tends

to drop with age. In the 7–12 years age group, 26% of children with disabilities are physically active for at least 60 minutes per day every weekday, while the proportion in 13–17-year-olds is 14%. The report also indicates that children and youth with disabilities participate more in organised sport than are active independently in their leisure time: 42% of 13–17-year-olds with disabilities take part in organised sport and 28% are physically active independently. Out of non-disabled children and youths, 49% are physically active independently.

In sport participation research of children and adolescents with disabilities there are certain limitations and challenges. Firstly, there is a lack of objective measures. Self-reported measures often exclude those with severe disabilities or who have difficulties in reading or writing. Special schools or classes are often excluded from school-based surveys. Understanding what physical activity or sports participation is can be challenging for respondents with disabilities. Moreover, different ways of questioning on disability or long-term illness make it hard to make comparisons between various studies. The questions of the WG on Disability Statistics have rapidly spread into surveys, but they are still in the development phase. For instance in the School Health Promotion study, the original WG module was intended for parents or caregivers to respond to and the researcher had to modify the items for adolescents (Ng & al., 2019). In addition, the measure used for walking difficulties may not be the best indicator for a person with physical impairment or using a wheelchair. However, there are some promising research initiatives. For instance the TUTKA (Participation of pupils with disabilities and long-term illnesses in surveys of physical activity behaviour) project is currently developing accessible and easy-to-read questionnaires to apply in special schools (Pikkupeura et al., 2020).

Barriers and facilitators of sport participation from the individual point of view

Barriers to sports participation can be divided into internal and external factors. For young people with a disability, internal factors include feelings of loneliness, fear of being bullied, lack of self-confidence, lack of time, lack of money, lack of knowledge of suitable sporting opportunities and health conditions. The external barriers are lack of suitable sporting opportunities, lack of accessible and safe spaces to do sports, lack of skilled coaches, leaders or assistants, the financial expense of hobbies and transportation problems. The barriers are similar with adults and the elderly, but with adults poor education, lack of time and tiredness play a greater role. The ageing population faces more problems with health, pain and safety. (Pyykkönen & Rikala, 2018, 29.) In addition, according to Hakanen et al. (2019), children and youth with disabilities living in the countryside participate less in sporting hobbies. The most active ones live in the larger cities. However, there is lack of research about hindrances and facilitators of sport participation of persons with disabilities.

One of the most promising resent approaches is the PAPAI-model. The PAPAI is a personal coach or buddy who helps a participant with disabilities to find a suitable hobby and overcome most common barriers. Since 2017, approximately 900 children and youths with disabilities have gone through the try-out period organised by students, who receive study credits be acting as a PAPAI. The success rate is close to 50% both in finding a hobby and increasing self-reported physical activity levels. (Paralympiakomitea 2020a.)

1.5 Conclusion

In Finland there is a relatively good knowledge base on disability sports history and policies. Disability sports and adapted physical activities have traditionally been organised only in separate settings and based on diagnoses and disability. At the early stage, persons with disabilities were not able to participate in mainstream sports services due to inaccessible facilities, lack of knowledge or negative attitudes. Segregation was justified by (re)habitational goals, peer support and empowerment. Persons with disabilities started to organise their own events and competitions such as the Paralympics, Special Olympics, Transplant Sports and Deaf Sports. This was the only way to get an opportunity to participate in sports or have fair competition.

There is a lack of knowledge with regard to the sports participation of Finnish people with disabilities. The largest gaps concern adults, their physical activity levels, if they are members of local sports clubs and their hindrances and facilitators in doing sports. To fill in the gaps, there are three options. We can try to get more out of existing registers, add new questions to general physical activity surveys and programme evaluations or launch new research concerning physical activity and the sports participation of persons with

disabilities. In each option, it is important to define key concepts such as impairment and disability, physical activity and participation in a solid and consistent way to provide reliable and comparable data.

Sports are not separated from society. There has been a shift from the special and segregated towards the mainstream. The inclusive change is most visible in school settings, where the number of special schools has diminished. The majority of elite athletes with a disability are already members in their sport-specific sports clubs and federations, and most disability sports are organised by their sport-specific federations. In addition, disability sports federations have gone through several unification processes. The ongoing change sets challenges for evaluators and governing bodies. For instance, some organisations may have been working inclusively for thirty years, whilst others are just at the beginning. Evaluation is a tool to provide important information for knowledge-based decision-making.

The autonomy of actors and the mixed overall sport system have been both barriers and facilitators of Finnish disability sports development. The state as a main responsible agent of Finnish sport policy and financing has been a good 'back rest' for disability sport: negotiations are organised only between state and disability sports organisations without other intermediate actors. This has increased the trust between single actors in the disability sport system and the state. The state can act as a strong source of the legitimation of inclusion processes. Accordingly, the autonomy and independence of actors can be a barrier to achieving common goals and acting together. To maintain the balance between single interests and national disability sport policy, more attention should be focused on common goal-setting and composing mutually shared policy actions.

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