

# **DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL APA INSTRUCTORS' WORK IN Finland**

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## 1. TIMELINE

### **1960s**

Sports organisations for disabled persons founded in Finland  
Posts for APA instructors in institutions

### **1970s**

University-level education in APA begins in Finland  
First pilot provision in some municipalities and proposal for an amendment to the Sports Act

### **1980s**

1981      APA commission  
1983      The first Finnish textbook on APA  
1984      Posts for APA instructors in municipalities

### **1990s**

APA as a specialisation (University of Jyväskylä)  
Professorship in APA (University of Jyväskylä)  
Finnish Paralympic Association and APA association

### **2000s**

Extensive projects  
A large number of new books and educational materials  
Increase in the funding of organisations  
Activities to enhance integration and inclusion

## 2. THE 1970s: LOCAL APA BEGINS IN FINLAND

The emergence of local provision of guided APA for persons with different impairments and chronic illnesses and for the elderly is largely attributable to work done by the Finnish Society of Sport Sciences. The Society organised the **first national seminar on APA as early as 1969**. In addition, it arranged seminars for APA instructors on different themes in 1973, 1974 and 1975.

**In 1976 the Society arranged local-level pilot projects in three municipalities** (Jyväskylä, Hyvinkää and Mäntsälä - a largish town, a medium-large town and a smaller municipality) with a view to developing APA. The projects were funded by the Ministry of Education (current Ministry of Education and Culture), the National Board of Health, the National Board of Social Welfare (current National Institute for Health and Welfare) and the Social Insurance Institution. The purpose of the three-year pilot was to develop procedures for arranging APA in municipalities of different sizes. These three municipalities had a total of 28 APA groups for persons with different impairments and chronic illnesses and the elderly, which catered for a total of approximately 400 participants.

The final report of the project, published by the Finnish Society of Sport Sciences<sup>1</sup>, put forward national recommendations for the development of APA and proposed to the Ministry of Education that it should set up a special committee to draw up a national development programme for the APA field.

Concomitantly with the first development programme, a committee was drafting a **Sports Act** for Finland, which was passed by Parliament in 1979 and **came into force in 1980**. The Sports Act committee also proposed that a specific committee or commission be appointed to develop the APA field. Accordingly, the Ministry appointed an **APA committee** chaired by Professor Eino Heikkinen **for a two-year term 1980-1981**.

The report of the APA committee<sup>2</sup> became the development programme for APA for the Ministry of Education and for the central government as a whole. The committee also conducted an international comparison, looking onto the organisation of APA in four other countries and drawing on them in outlining work to be done in Finland.

The report recommended that municipalities with a population of over 10,000 establish APA instructor posts. This was the first time the job description for such a post was drawn up. This required an amendment to the Sports Act of 1979 in order to make the local APA instructor post a government subsidised post alongside the posts of sports director, sports secretary and sports instructor. The committee also proposed that specialisation in APA be instituted in the training of PE teachers, sports instructors, and physiotherapists. This proposal was not realised until the early 1990s, but the Faculty of Sport Sciences in the University of Jyväskylä had a teacher responsible for APA already before this. Similarly, some sports institutes began to increase APA-related teaching already in the 1980s.

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<sup>1</sup> Liikuntatieteellisen Seuran julkaisu nro 74, Helsinki 1980

<sup>2</sup> Erityisryhmien liikuntatoimikunnan mietintö, Komiteamietintö 1981:44, OPM 1981

## **Strong reasons for the profession of APA instructor and its development**

The following is a summary of the justifications given for the posts of APA instructors. The reasoning is based on sport research findings, an analysis of sport culture and policy, and networking with different sectors of sports administration. It was on this basis that the Ministry of Education drafted the amendment to the Sports Act, which brought locally operating APA instructors to municipalities. The APA instructor system came into being in Finland in 1984.

### 1. Increased information about special groups in sports and physical activity:

The University of Jyväskylä had generated a great deal of information indicating on the one hand that persons with disabilities and chronic illnesses and the elderly were by far less physically active than the rest of the population. On the other hand, there were research findings indicating that persons belonging to these special groups would draw more benefit from physical activity than the population at large. A paradoxical situation came to light: sport provision catered least for those that would benefit most from physical activity.

### 2. International developments:

The Council of Europe had worked actively under the "Sport for All" banner, calling upon the member states to extend their sport culture towards special groups. Similarly, an international disability and APA symposium arranged by UNESCO in 1982 stressed the need to develop APA in its recommendations. Further, the information gathered in Finland about the other Nordic countries in particular spoke for the development of APA.

### 3. Developments in local sport provision triggered off by the amendment to the Sports Act:

The Sports Act gave local authorities a statutory duty to organise sports provision and to create conditions conducive to physical activity. For this they received government transfers. Sports boards were established in all municipalities, which also began to establish posts in the sports field (sports director, sports secretary, sports instructor), for which they received government transfers in relation to the number of residents. In addition to these posts, it was proposed that local authorities establish posts in which the main duty was sport instruction to special groups.

### 4. Links between disability sports and other sport culture negligible:

In the 1970s there were four independent disability sport organisations in Finland. These had local associations mainly in the major cities. In addition, it was known that only a fraction of disabled or chronically ill persons were members in these organisations. Mainstream sports clubs did not have sports provision suited to special groups.

**The guiding idea in the new system was that guided APA provided by the local sport system supplements the supply of disability sport organisations. Local guided APA did not include any provision geared to competitive sports; its main aim had to be amateur sports and HEPA.**

The report of the APA committee (1981) set out seven general principles underlying all its development proposals:

1. Sport culture must be developed for the population at large.
2. The demarcation between recreational and health-enhancing physical activity is not absolute or definite.
3. The development of APA is a long-term development task for sport culture.
4. Sport and health guidance must be used to promote favourable conditions for sport and physical activity for the population as a whole.
5. The public sport administration must create conditions for APA and also organise sports provision where needed (for people who do not belong to organisations).
6. The responsibility for coordinating and developing APA rests with the sport administration.
7. APA must form part of all sport planning and administration.

### 3. THE 1980s: AMENDMENT TO THE SPORTS ACT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Section 2 of the 1979 Sports Act formulates the remit of the sports system as follows:

*The local authorities shall create preconditions for their inhabitants to engage in sports by developing local and regional cooperation and health-promoting sports, by supporting civic activities, by providing sports facilities and by arranging sport activities, with due attention to the needs of special groups.*

This principle has guided the work of local sport authorities from the outset, from 1980 onwards. In Finland, there are altogether 5000-6000 employees within the sport sector (2008). This includes technical personnel, i.e. sports facility and grounds managers.

In 1983 the Ministry of Education prepared an amendment to the Sports Act, which provided that municipalities with a population of over 10,000 may employ an APA instructor. The same applies to two or several smaller municipalities working together.

Parliament passed the amendment as proposed. Local authorities began to hire APA instructors. **The first instructors began to work during 1984.**

The number of posts began to increase during the 1980s to the extent that at the advent of the 1990s there were APA instructors in 80 municipalities. The amendment to the Sports Act was decisive in encouraging local authorities to hire APA instructors who organise and guide physical activity for different special groups. In response to this trend, APA began to be developed as a specialisation of its own in the education of sports instructors. The APA specialisation took from six to twelve months. The Ministry of Education covered about half of the cost of the local posts from the pools and lottery funds and the local authorities defrayed the rest from tax income and entrance fees.

Qualified for the local APA instructor's post were persons with a PE teacher, sports instructor or physiotherapist qualification or who were well versed in APA, which meant a minimum of three years of work experience in APA.

Towards the end of the 1980s, municipalities had a total of 80 APA instructor, who led altogether 1800 groups with a total of 40,000 participants<sup>3</sup>. The special groups were the elderly, persons with physical disabilities, persons with sensory disabilities, persons with developmental disorders, persons with cardiovascular diseases, persons recuperating from mental illnesses, persons with pulmonary and respiratory illnesses and others with chronic illnesses. Some of the groups had participants from two or more groups. The most common sports were swimming and water gymnastics, gym training, ball games and dance. A model for the APA instructor job description is attached as Annex 1.

**The essential thing in this was that a new professional group, APA instructors, became an intrinsic part of the municipal – public – sports administration and activities. The disability organisations supported this development because the APA instructors provided a natural cooperation channel with the local level.**

#### **Other developments in the late 1980s**

APA activities gained momentum during the 1980s parallel with the intensified Paralympics activities. A basic textbook was published in Finland in 1983 and **national APA congresses began to be held every four years from 1986 onwards**. One significant impetus was the European Charter for Sports for All: Disabled People published by the Council of Europe, which was translated into Finnish and distributed to all municipalities and regional organisations. A **post with a remit including APA** was established in the Ministry of Education **in 1982. The Ministry also set up a permanent consultative committee for APA in 1988** (from 1991 the Subcommittee for adapted physical activity in the National Sports Council). This expert APA body is elected for a four-year term and comprises representatives of the foremost expert organisations, such as higher education institutions, national federations, local sport systems, the social and health administration and the sports administration.

#### **4. THE 1990s: THE WORK OF APA INSTRUCTORS BECOMES ESTABLISHED**

The whole of western Europe went through a recession in the early 1990s. For Finland the bleakest time was 1992 and 1993. The halt in funding increases brought the development in APA to a standstill. All municipalities with a population of over 10,000 had not yet hired APA instructors and did not have the resources to do so during the recession. However, the Ministry of Education and the National Sports Council did not want to let the recession cut back this sport sector after having made such a concerted effort to develop it and to set it in motion. The APA resources allocated to the local authorities and to national disability sport organisations were not cut during the financial straits. The Ministry instructed the local authorities to keep their APA posts.

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<sup>3</sup> Erityisryhmien liikunta 1990-luvulla, s. 26. Liikuntatieteellisen Seuran julkaisu 126, Helsinki 1991

Despite the support of the sports administration, local authorities could not offer sufficient APA services to the special groups. Concerned about this, the Ministry launched a project under the heading "APA into municipalities" together with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Finnish Society of Sport Sciences and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities with a view to developing APA services in medium-sized municipalities. The Finnish Society of Sport Sciences served as the home base for the project. As the recession had brought the hiring of APA instructors to a halt, the project focused on municipalities which did not yet have a specialised instructor. The two-year project catered for 30 municipalities with a population of 10,000 or more in different parts of Finland with the aim of creating a cooperation and work procedure for APA.

The active debate on APA in the 1980s and 1990s was stimulated by the national APA consultation days, which were modelled after the activities of the international umbrella organisation, the International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity (IFAPA). The number of participants in the days, which are held every four years, has grown from one to four hundred. To keep up with international developments, it is customary to invite eminent foreign keynote speakers to the event.

In local APA the 21st century has been a time of development projects. The APA into municipalities 1997–99 project continued in 2004–06 and in 2007–09. These projects were carried out by the Finnish Society of Sport Sciences in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities and the participating municipalities. In 2002 only three of the 42 municipalities with 20,000 or more residents and 18 of the 53 municipalities with a population of 10,000 to 20,000 had no APA instructors. Just like its predecessor, the 2004 – 2006 project focused on municipalities that did not have an APA instructor. Thanks to the foundation laid by the Finnish Society of Sport Sciences and the experience provided by the pilot projects, there was an effective model for local APA provision.

The ongoing structural changes at national level also influenced APA provision. At the time of the recession, there was a reform of government transfers to local authorities. The former detailed control by the central government was relaxed, with a corresponding increase in local discretion. The central government no longer obtained information about the purposes for which the transfers were used. This meant, among other things, a need to evaluate APA. The work of the National Sports Council in evaluating APA has been facilitated by data collected every four years on the work of APA instructors.

In education for the sport professions, more extensive specialisations began to be available in the early 1990s. The post of senior assistant established in 1974 in the University of Jyväskylä was made an associate professorship in 1995 and a professorship in 1998; there are also other APA-related posts at Jyväskylä.

The **HEPA committee** set up in the central government in 2000/2001 to develop health-enhancing physical activity has helped the field by means of 5-6 annually ongoing projects geared to develop local APA.

## 5. THE EARLY 2010s

At present, even though there are no the APA-earmarked government subsidies, there are around **100 full-time APA instructors** in Finnish municipalities. They cater for some **80,000 participants**. In addition, organisations provide APA for some **70,000 people**.

The Subcommittee for adapted physical activity of the National Sports Council has commissioned a national review of the work of local APA instructors every four years from 1986 onwards. The latest review describes the situation in 2009 (Ala-Vähälä 2010). According to the report, local APA has developed step by step, but there are still several challenges in the overall development, for instance as regards the number of APA instructor posts and cross-sectoral cooperation. The provision of APA has been steadily increasing during the first decade of the 21st century. This is indicated by figures describing resources, work loads and actual supply.

In summary, the situation is as follows according to the 2009 review<sup>4</sup>:

- The number of APA instructors has been still growing to the extent that there are currently 100 full-time instructors (and some 500 other hourly paid and assistant instructors); some major cities have hired two or more employees responsible for APA.
- The municipalities spend some 5.3 million euro annually on APA. The APA resources have increased slightly: in 2009 the government transfers for sport and physical activity to local authorities rose to 12 euro per capita (from €10.80), part of which is allocated to APA.
- There are around 2,900 guided APA groups, with a total of 70,000-80,000 participants.
- Local authorities have made some changes in the job description of APA instructors and added some duties relating to general development of HEPA.
- Apart from the annual work seminars for local APA instructors, there is a separate meeting with the network of APA instructors working in major cities.
- The development of APA is supported with separate development projects.
- In 2010 the total subsidy allocated through the state budget is some seven million euro, of which municipalities receive 2.5 million and organisations 3.5 million.
- APA provided by organisations is supported by local government subsidies and caters for some 70,000 people.
- The sport authorities arrange nearly half of all local APA supply, with the social and health authorities providing around 15% and organisation around one quarter.
- The development of inclusive sport and physical activity has changed the job description of APA instructors to some extent, but there is no exact information available how. At its

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<sup>4</sup> Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2010:17

clearest, inclusion is seen as collaboration between organisations in the field and sport-specific federations and sports clubs.

The future development themes will be based on the recommendations of the APA days held in 2010. The themes relate to the development of APA in a changing municipal structure, the development of applied physical activity for children, the promotion of physical activity among the elderly, and measures to step up integration and inclusion.

## **ANNEX 1. JOB DESCRIPTION OF APA INSTRUCTORS**

1. To plan and organise APA
2. To develop APA in collaboration with other sectors of local administration, organisations and other partners
3. To instruct APA groups as far as possible
4. To take care of information and communication relating to APA
5. To take care of training relating to APA and give expert consultancy when needed
6. To put forward proposals relating to APA in regard of local budgets and sports plans
7. To take care of monitoring and statistics relating to local APA
8. To follow developments in APA and participate in training in the field
9. To carry out other tasks assigned by the supervisor

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