

EUROPEAN SURVEY AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON AGEING, DISABILITY AND ADAPTED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: EDUCATIONAL AND POLICY LEVEL



**"AGEING AND DISABILITY -
A NEW CROSSING BETWEEN
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY,
SOCIAL INCLUSION AND
LIFE-LONG WELL-BEING"**

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PREFACE

WE MUST ACT NOW

Everybody in Europe knows the problem of the "Tsunami" coming over us with a continuous increasing number of elderly persons. Many of them have a kind of functional limitation due to age or disability. Our society should anticipate on this problem by convincing all elderly persons, their family members and caregivers to be more physically active.

Scientific research proved indeed that Physical Activity is of major importance in preventing premature ageing, maintaining functional independence, decreasing the risk factor of primary and secondary disabilities and increasing life-long well being.

The Thematic Network "Ageing and Disability - a new crossing between physical activity, social inclusion and life-long well-being" united experts from 29 European countries during a period of three years to make a State of the Art of the actual situation in 29 European countries, concerning the general policy, the education level of providers of physical activity and the awareness of elderly persons with and without disabilities of the benefits of more Physical Activity. **You can read in this booklet the summary of it together with our recommendations.** We advocate for concrete measures in all European countries in order to fill the gap between the actual shortcomings in these areas:

Firstly, a general approach for including the area of ageing and disability and the benefits of physical activity in all educational levels of persons working with the elderly. Therefore we produced a general content for bachelor level studies.

Secondly, the preparation of experts in the field of Adapted Physical Activity for the Elderly for which we produced the content of a European Master programme in Adapted Physical Activity for the Elderly.

Thirdly, tackling the motivation problem of elderly persons with and without disabilities to adopt an active lifestyle. Therefore we produced a wonderful DVD available in 15 European languages "Never too old to be Active: The Joy of Movement" which will motivate elderly persons to be more physically active by experiencing the Joy that Physical Activities indoor, outdoor and in the water can provide.

All these concrete products, this recommendations booklet together with a media campaign that we will start in all countries should make our elderly persons more active, longer independent and should provide them a better quality of life. I want to thank all experts of the 29 European Countries for their enthusiasm, efficiency and excellent products they provided, by sharing their specialisation field with all of us.

We all are very much convinced that we must act now.



*Prof. Herman Van Coppenolle,
coordinator*

SOME ASPECTS RELATED TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF ELDERLY PERSONS WITH AND WITHOUT A DISABILITY - CURRENT SITUATION IN THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Summary of the European survey conducted by the Thematic Network Adapted Physical Activity (THENAPA II)

INTRODUCTION

The number of ageing people and ageing people with a disability is rapidly increasing in Europe. Therefore, the topic of ageing has been identified, more than ever, as a top theme on the European agenda. European communities are characterised by a rising proportion of old and very old citizens. A continuing increase in lifestyle-expectancy is predicted for decades to come, along with a progressive reduction in birth rates in most of the European countries (European Commission's Green Paper 'Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between generations, March 2005). Demographers estimate that by 2050, the share of the 60+ age group will reach 37% in Europe. Within this group, there will be a significant growth in the number of people living into their 80s and



beyond, that is, reaching the category of the 'very old'. Whereas today these constitute 7.5 % of the European population, by 2050 most European Member States will have at least 14.4 % of their population aged 80 or over. Population ageing is, according to the World Health Organisation (2002), one of humanity's greatest triumphs and supreme challenges. This phenomenon has been described as "a decline in the proportion of children and young people and an increase in the proportion of people aged 60 and over" (World Health Organisation, 2002, p.6).



Whilst the ability of individuals to reach increasingly older age is in itself significant, it is imperative that this increased longevity corresponds to an ability to 'age positively'. That is, to remain healthy, engaged in the community and able to enjoy the opportunities afforded by older age.

Most of the ageing people could have some physical or mental disability, whether acquired at birth, later in life, or experienced as part of the ageing process. To be clear, this does not only



refer to people who experience disability as part of the ageing process, but also to those who had been disabled since child or adulthood and who are now ageing; disabled people do age, and some ageing people are becoming disabled.

According to 'Eurostat' data, by the end of 2040, 6.5 % of the total population, or 24.5 million people, will be severely impaired. We are living in a society that is increasingly getting older; however, we are rather unprepared to meet the needs and interests of this age group, particularly of those with disabilities.

Fundamentally, we believe that ageing is associated with maturity, wisdom, competence and respect. These values apply equally to ageing people with disabilities. However, ageing can often imply negative connotations, such as declining physical health and cognitive abilities, inactivity, poverty, social isolation and social independency. Hence, with respect to ageing, priority should be given to concepts of healthy and active ageing. Promoting positive perspectives through active ageing strategies may result in an added value to the individual as well as to society.

The scientific evidence is clear - regular physical activity has powerful positive effects on both physical and psychological health. Conversely, physical inactivity has a high human cost in terms of health. It shortens the life expectancy, decreases quality of life, and limits functional independence. (R.J. Shepherd & W.W. Spirduso)

Albeit all the evidence that proves the positive influence of physical activity, it still needs to be transferred to the elderly disabled sector. For this specific group the need of physical activity is of extreme importance (EU Disability Action Plan 2005). Since this group did not exist some years ago, knowledge and



research, and consequently qualified professionals in this field, are lacking. These professionals have to be trained now, to meet present and future requirements.

Hence, a Thematic Network is urgently required to compensate for the current lack of information and resources in this specific domain, by:

- Collecting and bringing together data from all over Europe, concerning physical activity and sport for older adults and the disabled elderly;
- Creating a basic profile to implement the subject of adapted physical activity for the elderly in European Higher Education curricula;
- Addressing the general and shared needs of all ageing people with and without disabilities at the



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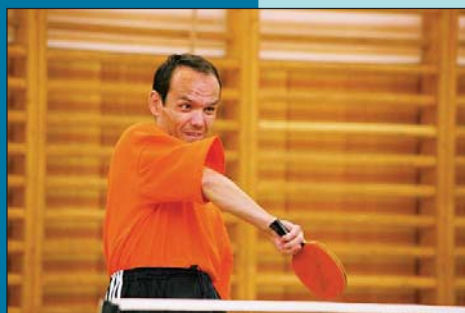
The aim of this study is to compare and map the data gathered by the Thematic Network, THENAPA II: "Ageing and disability - a new crossing between physical activity, social inclusion and life-long well-being", in order to

- Give a European demographic overview of the elderly with a disability;
- Find hiatuses in the care for older people with a disability; and
- Gather information for the staging of the European Master in Adapted Physical Activity for the Elderly.

In order to achieve the aims of the THENAPA II project, recommendations have been developed, for suggestions to the European Commission and Member States. An overview of the data will expose both positive situations and lacunae that are critical to the current situation.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the analysis of data gathered through a national survey (run by the partners of THENAPA II and carried out in 29 countries of the European Union).



same time as being able to emphasise and meet the very specific and varied needs of the individuals.

Instruments:

During the 2nd Forum of the Network the expert members of THENAPA II, developed a template in order to facilitate and structure the data collection. Experts from 29 European countries gathered data related to the different areas of interest. The template included information and figures on demographics, physical activity and inactivity levels, living arrangements, examples of good practice, specific education provision, research on ageing, disability and physical activity, and national policies on physical activity and ageing.

Inclusion criteria:

All partners of the 'THENAPA II-project: all members of the European Union, and except for two members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

Exclusion Criteria:

Estonia, France, Iceland, Luxembourg, Portugal and the United Kingdom did not fill in the template and therefore have been excluded, except for the part of demographics.

Statistical Analysis:

A comparative study was used to:

- Identify the how much the topic of physical activity and sport for elderly is included in academic curricula across Europe;
- Define the examples of best practices and good programmes found across Europe; and
- Prepare teaching materials and courses at a unified level.

Demographics:

Between 2002 and 2005, the total population within Europe increased at an average rate of 7.65 %. It should be noted that this trend is only occurring in the Western, Southern and Nordic countries. Most of the East European countries are growing slightly negative.

The fact that Europe is ageing, is a well-know phenomenon. Data shows that the total population of people over 65 increased 12,86 % between 2002 and 2005. Demographic data of elderly people with a disability is incomparable since

- It is not available in most of the countries,
- Different years and age groups are defined; and
- There are interpretations of data and varied definitions of disability.

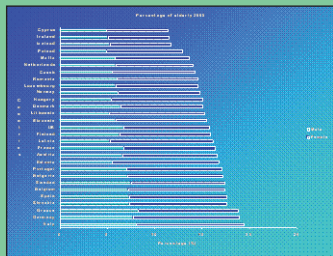
Living arrangements:

In Europe, the trend is that most of the elderly people reside at their own home. In the Eastern and Mediterranean countries, 75 % of the elderly people are still living at home, with or without support of their family. There is a slight difference with Western countries, where 40 % of the ageing people are living in geriatric institutions. The Nordic countries differ from the rest of Europe. Most of the elderly people (75%) are living independently with support. They live in detached or semi-detached houses. In spite of different conditions, home care for elderly is increasing almost all over Europe. Currently, 20% of the European ageing population has some support through home care. This percentage is expected to increase in the future. Elderly people living independently do not require as much financial expense as frail elderly in specialised geriatric institutions.

Examples of good practice:

This data was not collected for comparative purposes, but to provide a directory of good practices that could be copied by the different countries.

RESULTS





Although many good practices were presented, not all the programmes were exclusive for elderly people with a disability. Most of them promoted physical activity for older adults in general. Some of them include elderly people with a disability, but most of them did not specifically mention the elderly with a disability. Other programmes, specific for people with a disability, were aimed at younger disabled persons and did not include the ageing population. The few programmes, exclusive for elderly people with a disability, were all residence-based programmes. The prevailing concept is that we want to get them active sooner so that they can live longer independently. The good thing is that we can learn from it and adapt it to the elderly with a disability who are still living at home.

Specific education provision:

One of the main aims of THENAPA II is to prepare qualified professionals. In the near future, we would like to initiate a European Master in Adapted Physical Activity for the Elderly. Before commencing such a programme, it is good to know what already exists in European universities, what more information do professionals need and what the gaps in our educational systems are. Comparing the education systems of all European countries provided a good background for this exercise.

The data indicates that only Austria and Bulgaria provide a separate module that includes ageing, disability and physical activity. Ageing and physical activity were covered together in 45% of the European countries, and disability and physical activity in 39%. In most countries ageing, disability and physical activity are presented as a separate subject. Our aim is to combine these three themes in one European Master.

The data also indicates that the subject of physical activity was only taught in courses related to physical education, physiotherapy and sport sciences.

Modules concerning disability and/or ageing were present in a broader area, which is, in courses related to physical education, physiotherapy, sport science, medicine, nursing, social work and special education.

The study concluded that there is a critical gap concerning physical activity knowledge. Other professionals, besides physical educators and physiotherapists, should also learn about the benefits of physical activity, especially those who are working with elderly people with or without a disability.

Research on ageing, disability and physical activity:

Universities or colleges mostly conduct research on ageing, disability and physical activity through several themes. For example:

- APA
- Fall - prevention
- Ageing and physical activity
- Different disabilities and P.A.
- ...

In the near future, this knowledge should be converted to the practice.

National policy on physical activity and ageing:

The study has shown that since elderly persons with a disability are a minority, a specific related policy is lacking all over Europe - consequently,

they require special attention.

Most of the policies related to ageing or disability focus on health rather than on physical activity. In some countries, governments promote a healthy lifestyle, which indirectly includes physical activity. Today a number of governments are promoting physical activity, especially for specific target groups, such as older adults, persons with a disability, youngsters, people with overweight, women, etc. It is a positive sign that governments are showing more interest in physical activity as part of healthy life-style programmes.

CONCLUSION

The population of Europe is ageing. In the first few decades of the new millennium, the proportion and number of older people is expected to rise substantially. Nearly 37% of the European population will be aged 60 years or more in 2050. Older people are more diverse than any other age group. Each generation of older people brings its unique historical and cultural experiences with them as they age. As with the rest of society, older people have different backgrounds and beliefs and like to be treated as individuals. Physical ageing is a slow, gradual, life-long process. The rate of physical ageing among humans varies widely, dependent upon a complex interaction of genetic, physical, life style, social, and environmental factors. The greatest





decline in the human body occurs between 30-40 years of age. Disabilities, sensory loss, and chronic diseases increase with age but are not inevitable ageing conditions.

Data on ageing people with a disability is not available in most of the European countries or are incomparable. In the near future research will be needed to know more about this population.

The majority of seniors live independently and require no assistance with daily tasks. The tendency is that more people are staying at home with the support of 'home-care'. Research has shown that living longer independently is not only better for the well-being of the elderly individual, but also procures financial benefit for governments. The cost of an elderly living in a geriatric institution is much higher than if they were to live independently in their own home.

THENAPA II believes that qualified professionals in the area of physical activity for the elderly have to be prepared now, so they can meet the new demands of the future. Our aim is

that in the near future, physical educators, 'APA' specialists, physiotherapists, caregivers, etc. acquire better knowledge and training concerning ageing, disability and (adapted) physical activity. To promote physical activity amongst the elderly it is recommended to have basic and profound knowledge about those topics. The European Master in Adapted Physical Activity for the Elderly, with the existing from 11 modules, develops competencies in a variety of specialists. Fundamentally, we believe promoting physical activity through caregivers may result as an added value to the quality of life of the elderly individual. The training and educating of the appropriate personnel will result in a number of benefits that will be visible in the near future.

Although there is some awareness about the benefits of physical activity and many of the issues regarding elderly (with a disability) are being discussed nowadays, there is still a long way to go to achieve full awareness and inclusion of people with a disability. The challenge is to expand the concept of active lifestyle for all the elderly.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Objectives:

- To define the European dimensions and the role of the physical activity for:
 - Decreasing the risk factors for secondary disabilities
 - Maintaining functional independence of the elderly
 - Prevention of the "premature ageing" in older adults
 - Increasing life-long well-being and health promotion
- To analyse existing structures of education and examples of "best" practices in the field of physical activity and sport for elderly in the curricula of the students of Physical Education, Physiotherapy, Recreation, Rehabilitation, Health Sciences, Kinesiology, Sport and Human Movement Sciences
- To disseminate those examples through co-operation between university faculties and departments, which will contribute to the students mobility in search for the best expertise in the area
- To promote independence, productivity, self-determination, community inclusion and full citizenship for the older adults
- To create competencies in a variety of specialists in order to increase their employability
- To induce collaborative effort among University departments, local counties and the government
- To contribute to the lifelong learning process by raising the awareness that not only the adoption of positive health related behaviours but also their maintenance is crucial as the population is continuously ageing



The THENAPA II-project, funded by the European Commission aims to promote Adapted Physical Activity (APA) among elderly persons with and without a disability, to improve the expertise in the area and to promote awareness of its importance among caregivers and policy-makers. The project has reviewed the information, statistics, good practices and policies extending throughout Europe which was gathered by experts in the field of APA - partners of THENAPA II. This research identified the need for this area to be included on the school curriculum. These programs are intended to motivate students from different academic backgrounds to work with and

for the elderly population and at the same time to help expand the concept of active lifestyle for the elderly.

These **RECOMMENDATIONS** have been developed by as part of the THENAPA II project in order to achieve its objectives and to progress the work on healthy ageing. The THENAPA II working group recommends that the European Commission and EU member states implement its findings under 3 different headings: (1) the policy, (2) research and/or education and (3) the individual (elderly person with/without a disability).



Policy:

THENAPA II recommends that the European Commission and its member states:

- Develop sustainable policies, educational programmes with a specific focus on APA and financial frameworks, specific and integrated in other policies, programmes and frameworks for elderly persons with and without a disability at European, national, regional and local levels.
- Support and encourage Universities to include



the subject of APA for elderly in the relevant curricula at all educational levels. To start up a new Masters Programme in this area, the development of which could be facilitated by THENAPA II.

- Strengthen APA promotion in basic and continuing education for all relevant professional groups who are working with elderly persons. THENAPA II developed a guideline of what these professionals should know.
- Integrate significance of adapted physical activity for older persons with a disability in all areas such as economy, housing, healthcare and the environment.
- Develop indicators for healthy ageing (prevention)
- Develop action plans for implementation of 'active ageing' lifestyle, with the participation of older adults, at all levels and specifically at local levels.



- Develop strategies for attracting young and educated professionals in the social services provision for elderly



and specifically the providers of APA services

Research/educational Level:

THENAPA II recommends that the European Commission, its member states and the European Universities:

Research:

- Develop research for elderly people with a disability:
- Socioeconomic status: standards of living, living cost, housing ...
- APA
- Ageing with a disability

- Improve or support research to find ways of motivating and changing the lifestyles of older people, especially the 'hard-to-reach' groups (elderly with a disability)
- Disseminate research findings and promote

practical applications among all stakeholders

- Stimulate exchange of knowledge and experience (good practices) between the research structures and the formations involved in the elderly care

Education:

- Stimulate the implementation of a new programme of study facilitated by THENAPA II (Master Level). A joint master programme "APA





for elderly" should start on European level.

- Develop useful partnership between the European Universities and colleagues in the area of APA
- Stimulate the use of the guidelines for the bachelor programmes, so that further implementation of the obligatory module APA for elderly should be included in the bachelor curriculum of PE, Physiotherapy, Nursing and Social care could be possible.
- Stimulate and organize special qualification seminars for the staff members of elderly homes

Individual:

THENAPA II recommends that the European Commission and it's member states:

- Stimulate the awareness of the importance of adapted physical activity, using a variety



of information and dissemination methods and channels including the dissemination and distribution of the products, made by THENAPA II (DVD, Activity cards).

- Increase the level of physical activity among older adults with/without a disability in order to reach the international recommendations of 30 minutes or more of, at least, moderate intensity physical activity in most, preferably all days of the week.



- Create the conditions and opportu-

nities for older adults with/without a disability to have regular physical activity, social relations and meaningful occupations.

- Design, implement and review projects and programmes involving older people with/without a disability. Rely on scientific data and evidence-based research when designing and implementing projects and programmes.
- Stimulate education of all caregivers working with elderly people with/without a disability to inform them about disability among elderly, the importance of APA and how to get this population active (motivation).



THENAPA II would like to thank all people from the following universities who assisted with the data collection for our survey and the development of these recommendations:

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- Palacky University Olomouc, Faculty of Physical Culture, **Czech Republic**
- Academy of Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy, Holstebro, **Denmark**
- University of Tartu, Institute of Exercise Biology and Physiotherapy, **Estonia**
- Jyväskylän Yliopisto, Department of Physical Education, **Finland**
- Université de Picardie Jules Verne, Faculty of Sport Science, Amiens, **France**
- Freie Universität Berlin, **Germany**
- Democritus University of Thrace, Department of Physical Education and Sport Science, Komotini, **Greece**
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- Iceland University of Education, Reykjavik, **Iceland**
- University of Trento, Centre of bioengineering and exercise science, **Italy**
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