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*Faculteit Bewegings- en  
Revalidatiewetenschappen*

# **Adapted Physical Activity in Belgium**

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## 1. Introduction

Movement, physical activity and sports for disabled are generally referred to by the term 'Adapted Physical Activity'. This branch of sports focuses on the interests and capabilities of individuals with limiting conditions.



Belgium is a federal state with a population of 10 309 725. Since 1980 the country is divided in 3 Communities (Gemeenschappen); Vlaamse Gemeenschap (the Dutch-speaking, northern part of the country), Franse Gemeenschap (French-speaking, southern part) and Duitstalige Gemeenschap (Oostkantons). Sports and education are classified under culture, which is a competence of the Gemeenschappen. For that reason sports and education in general and APA in particular might be organised differently in these Communities. To keep it simple, we divide the country in 2 parts: Flanders (Dutch-speaking) and Wallonia (French-speaking).

## 2. Education

The Bachelor Master-structure, recently introduced, has led to some changes and is still changing higher education in Belgium. At university level, special training in APA can be integrated in basic academic programmes of Physical Education and/or Physiotherapy, or it can be incorporated in a post-graduate degree. Six Belgian universities offer an education in Physical Education and/or Physiotherapy and therefore, these are checked for any APA related topics.

- Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Flanders)

In the second cycle of the basic Physical Education programme, students can choose an orientation 'Special Physical Education'. In the courses students get an introduction through lectures, teaching practice and internships in the different areas of APA.

In the Physiotherapy programme, students are trained in the methodological aspects of working with different disabilities, both in theoretical courses and practical sessions. Students of both Physiotherapy and Physical Education have the opportunity to choose complementary hours in APA next to their general programme.

At the advanced level a post-graduate certificate in Psychomotor Therapy (PMT) is open to Licentiates in Physical Education and/or Physiotherapy. This programme is a one-year study including theoretical and practical subjects, seminars, internships and a graduation paper. PMT is merely oriented towards psychosocial disorders and children with developmental and emotional disorders.

'European Master in Adapted Physical Activity' is a master-after-master of the ERASMUS/SOCRATES programme. It's hosted at the KU Leuven and focuses on research and methodology in APA, with contributions of experts in the different areas of APA.

- Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Flanders)

In contrast with the past, there is no optional unit 'Special Physical Education' anymore in the basic Physical Education programme.

At the advanced level, the VUB is partner in the 'European Master in Adapted Physical Activity' programme.

- Université Libre de Bruxelles (Wallonia)

In agreement with the Flemish division, there is no 'Special Physical Education' orientation in this university. On the other hand, the ULB is a partner in the 'European Master in Adapted Physical Activity' programme.

- Rijksuniversiteit Gent (Flanders)

In the second cycle of the physical education programme, a option oriented on APA is offered: 'bewegingseducatie en aangepast bewegingsonderwijs'. This programme consists of theoretical courses and practical training in adapted physical activity.

- Université d'Etat de Liège (Wallonia)

A number of obligatory theoretical and practical subjects in special physical education are offered to physical education students. There is no post-graduate training programme.

- Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve (Wallonia)

An optional unit 'special physical education' is offered to students in physical education, in the second cycle of their formation. This unit includes theoretical and practical training in different aspects of APA. Physiotherapy students have some obligatory classes in APA and in the second cycle they can choose for an orientation towards APA.

In addition there is a post-graduate programme in special physical education which is open not only to licentiates in physical education and/or licentiates in physiotherapy. It is also a one-year programme with theoretical and practical courses, training periods and a graduation paper.

The UCLouvain is partner in the 'European Master in Adapted Physical Activity'.

Some, non-university, institutes for higher education in Physical Education or Physiotherapy also pay attention to people with a disability. This can be in theoretical courses, teaching practices and/or workshops and sports camps.

A third possibility for education in APA is oriented towards coaches, instructors or physical trainers without a university degree. Governmental sports administrations BLOSO (Commissariaatgeneraal voor de Bevordering van de Lichamelijke Ontwikkeling, de Sport en de Openluchtrecreatie, Flanders) and ADEPS (Administration d'Education Physique et Sports, Wallonia) offer training programs directed to sport for handicapped people. These courses are usually oriented on a particular sport, and involve technical and pedagogical aspects of sports participation, both on a recreational and competitive level.

### **3. Organisation of APA**

#### Sports Federations

Like sport for healthy people, sports for disabled is spread out over a large number of clubs. These sport clubs deal with one or a limited number of discipline(s) and are usually oriented to a specific population. Over the past decades an amount of federations were founded and these were joined into several organisations in order to receive governmental support. These organisations have databases with information about all the Belgian sport clubs: disciplines, activities, facilities, target groups and level of competition.

In Belgium there are two federations responsible for competition for disabled, one in Flanders (VLG) and one in Wallonia (FSBAP-WB). These two are joint together in the Belgian Paralympic Committee (BPC). BPC is a member of the different international sports federations and is responsible for all official international representation of Belgian athletes. A second circuit is sport for mentally disabled, organised by Special Olympics Belgium.

For recreational athletes, there are two organisations in Flanders: Recreas and Psylos. The latter is oriented to mental healthcare. FEMA is the Wallonian organisation that stimulates sports for all.

## Adapted Physical Activity in Schools

The aim of special education is to match schooling and education to the individual needs of the child. They try to make the children as independent as possible, also through physical education. Currently children with a disability are kept in regular schools, if possible, and are included in the regular classes. Therefore we should make a difference between special schools and regular schools that integrate disabled children.

### *APA in special schools:*

In 2003, 6% of children between 6 and 12 and less than 4% of children between 12 and 18 years old followed an adapted education in a special school in Belgium.

Special schools are divided in 8 types, oriented to specific types of impairment. In correspondence to regular schools, physical education in special schools consists of at least 2 hours every week. In addition a paramedical staff of physiotherapists, special physical educators and occupational therapists provide individualised forms of APA. Some sports federations for disabled both in Vlaanderen and Wallonië work together with these special schools for extra-murus activities and sports happenings.

### *APA for children integrated in regular schools:*

Recently, children with a disability are offered additional help so they can stay in the regular school system (Geïntegreerd Onderwijs). These students are supported in educational and adaptation problems also during physical education classes. With minor adaptations and some creativity, PE teachers should be able to have disabled students actively participating in regular PE classes.

## Adapted Physical Activity in Rehabilitation Centres

In Belgium most of the rehabilitation centres are connected to a university hospital or larger general hospitals. It is their aim to achieve the highest level of functional independence for each individual. To achieve these goals different therapy programmes, including sports participation, are provided.

The specific aims of this sports participation are both situated in the field of 'functional rehabilitation' as well as an 'social (re)integration'. Continuous efforts are done by lots of volunteers to encourage patients in rehabilitation to become active sporters, already during their rehabilitation period in the centre. It should be encouraged that every rehabilitation centre therefore is linked to at least one sport club for disabled to facilitate this target. For example in Leuven there is a unique co-operation between the APA-department of our faculty (FABER) and the rehabilitation centre of Pellenberg. Professors, students, elite sporters and rehabilitants work together as a team. This approach leads to very hopeful results.

### **4. Costs**

Anyone who wants to sport has to turn to a sport club, normal as well as disabled persons. Special sport clubs function like regular sport clubs. This means participants have to pay a membership fee and buy their own equipment. With this fee sporters are insured and trainers get paid. Subsidies for equipment are only obtainable for daily use, not for sport participation.

### **5. Attitude**

The Belgian constitution declares all men are equal. Therefore people with a handicap should be treated the same way a normal person is and it should be possible for them to do anything a normal person can. In practice, the accessibility in a lot of public places, like sport centres, is still insufficient for people with a disability.

The public opinion towards a handicap is not yet what it should be. Some organisations like f.i. 'Ouders voor Inclusie' and 'Inclusie Vlaanderen' are stimulating

inclusive initiatives. Some institutes for higher education and universities are organising inclusive sport camps for their own students together with persons with a handicap. Here, all participants have the opportunity to overcome a threshold fear in taking contact with people with a handicap. This is a very important step to promote inclusion through APA.

## **6. Research**

Research in APA is conducted in the six universities mentioned above. Almost the whole field of APA is covered over the different locations. This research is done in co-operation with Faculties of Medicine, Physiology and Psychology, or in co-operation with European partner universities, and supported by different national and international governmental organisations.

## **7. Conclusion**

Concerning the education of special trained physical educators and physiotherapists, Belgium takes a leading place. In addition the universities carry out a lot of research to stay up to date in the area of APA.

For the different types of disorders sport organisations are available, and still there should be made a continuous effort to extend the amount of clubs on both competitive and recreational level. Secondly special schools offer adapted education to children with a disability, but more and more an inclusive strategy is encouraged. In rehabilitation, patients are encouraged to practice sports and keep on doing that when going home.

Although the attitude of the public in relation to an handicap is not optimal yet, efforts are being made to include people with a disability in every aspect of daily living.

## 8. References

ADAPT CD-rom

[http://mailserv.cc.kuleuven.ac.be/belgian\\_universities/](http://mailserv.cc.kuleuven.ac.be/belgian_universities/)

[http://www.adapt-europe.org/belgium/sport\\_fr.htm/](http://www.adapt-europe.org/belgium/sport_fr.htm/)

<http://www.adepts.be/>

<http://www.bloso.be/>

<http://www.kuleuven.be/thenapa/>

<http://www.paralympic.be/>

<http://www.vlg.be/>