

**K . U . L e u v e n**  
**Faculty of Kinesiology and Rehabilitation**

**Erasmus Mundus Master in Adapted Physical Activity**

**Comparative Study course / L.Duesund**

# **Adapted Physical Activity in Israel**

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## **1. Introduction**

Israel is a small parliamentary democracy country (~20,000 Km<sup>2</sup>) which lies on the Mediterranean shores between Africa and Asia. The country is bordered by Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt (with the last two there are peace agreements from 1994 and 1979 respectively).

It has a population of 7 million, and the average GDP per capita is ~19,000\$.

EU relations with Israel are governed by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership established through the EU-Israel Association Agreement and the regional dimension of the Barcelona Process.

The aim of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is to turn the Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and co-operation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity; to strengthen political dialogue, the development of economic and financial cooperation, the social, cultural and human dimension.

About ten percent of the population of Israel are defined as persons with "special needs / disabled", 150,000 of them suffers from extreme disabilities.

This population is divided to three categories:

- Anatomical disabilities (e.g. amputates)
- Physiological disabilities (e.g. heart diseases)
- Mental disabilities (e.g. retardation)

And for each category (or combined) there are different subcategories.

The APA target groups include a variety of programs, for all ages and aims:

- Competitive sports, such as: sailing, hand cycling, swimming, tennis, basketball, Badminton, etc..
- Leisure activities, such as: hand cycling, trampoline, ball games, 4WD travelers, mountains climbing, etc...
- Integrated activities (youth through elderly), such as frisbee, ball games and bicycle/hand cycling journeys...
- Rehabilitative programs, such as rehabilitative swimming, gym programs and more.

#### Elite sports:

Israel is one of the 23 countries that participated in the first Paralympic Games in Rome in 1960.

In 1968 Israel was hosting the Paralympics games. Israel's offer to host the Games was motivated by its wish to mark its 20th anniversary of independence.

The new classification method was probably one of main reasons for the rise of the Paralympics participants in the country (and world-wide), changing the essence of APA; The old "rehabilitation and a social approach" has been changed to a competitive and professional one, enabling people with different disabilities to compete with similar.

The recent triumph for the Israeli team in Athens 2004 included 4 Gold , 4 Silver and 5 Bronze medals.

In Israel about 70% of the Paralympics team are IDF (Israeli Defense Force) casualties, probably because of the nature of their disability and the different attitude towards them in the public.

## **2. Initial Education**

- There is a variety of bachelors programs with regards to APA education. These include: B.A., B.Sc. and B.Ed. programs in physiotherapy, physical education, physiology and kinesiology with specialization in "special needs" populations.
- There are also many professional (Non academic diplomas) in various rehabilitation techniques and methods.
- Note: the Para-academic studies are very popular and appreciated. For example, in my work place I get credit for diplomas such as Halliwik, gym instructor or other.

## **3. APA Organizations**

The Israel Sports Association for the Disabled (ISAD):

The association conducts a wide range of all-year-round activities in disabled sports, including basketball, tennis, volleyball, badminton, table tennis, shooting, riding, archery, swimming, blind goalball, and sailing. This trade union represents the APA consumer's population before their employers, the insurance companies and other authorities.

As well as arranging sport activities, the ISAD arranges conferences & advanced studies and working for anchoring APA by regulations and law. ISAD runs a "Hothouse" program for disabled children who express desires to participate in sports. Often, the most critical step is to get a disabled child to join the right sports program, to identify the sport that would best suit his or her physical capabilities and athletic potential. For this purpose, ISAD works in close cooperation with the Ilan Organization for children with physical disabilities at the Spivak Sport Center for the Disabled. At this well equipped facility, professional coaches and instructors help disabled children get started in various sports.

ISAD's "Hothouse" project gets disabled children to participate in various sports at a tender age and progresses with vigorous training through their school years.

Other than the official organization, there are several non-profit voluntary organizations, such as:

Challenge ("Etgarim") - The Israel Outdoor Sports and Recreation Association for the Disabled.

Etgarim was founded in 1995 by a group of disabled veterans of the Israel Defense Forces, disabled civilians, and senior rehabilitation professionals.

Challenge is a nonprofit organization that provides outdoor sport and recreation activities. This organization is open to any physically or mentally disabled person, regardless of age, sex, race, ethnic or religious affiliation.

## **Governmental regulations**

There is a basic law condemning any discrimination of people because of their disabilities. The law dictates the amounts of money provided as assistance for them, according to their category and their disability percentage.

- The exact amounts are unclear and **confidential**, and differ between different cases (nature of the disability, percentage, category, and other different factors)

Unfortunately, government funding is insufficient. Most treatments and activities cost more than the basic grant and so all APA relevant organizations depended on donations and volunteers.

Furthermore not all APA activities are recognized as such, and there isn't a consensus and one general opinion among the medical staff about each activity and its benefits to the individual.

## 4. Costs

The **government** sponsors sport centers for the disabled. A subsidized yearly membership costs 130 € in average and any additional activities costs around 10€ per hour.

Private APA programs cost 20-50 € per hour.

There are also a few voluntary - non profit organizations which offer APA activities for free-symbolic payment.

## 5. Attitude

Although suffering from varies disabilities the special need population's in Israel main problems have to do with civilian issues, such as legal battles for getting jobs, access, and acknowledgment.

- Most public buildings do not have sufficient access, and many special needs person find it hard to find a job that would feet in with their daily medical-rehab routine.
- Children: the ministry of education's policy is to integrate special needs children within the regular system. However the mainstream educational system does not have APA activities in its curriculum. These often causes social problems for them, and since adjusting the current system to support integrated APA activities in school has huge economical aspects they are obliged to stay in class while their friends play outside.

## 6. Research

- In Israel during the 1970's a number of well organised research works concerning APA topics were conducted by well-known scientists, such as work physiologist Prof. O. Bar Or, sport psychologist Prof. E. Geron and neuropediatricist Dr. R. Spira. works were funded either by the Ministry of Defence Rehabilitation Department, by foreign grants or by the
- Currently, research is concentrated mainly at the Zinman College for Physical Education, (one of them is the EMDAPA professors - Yeshayahu Shayke Hutzler Ph.D) and includes topics such as:
  - Survey of sports facilities and programs in Israeli vocational rehabilitation centres, in Israeli special education institutions and in Israeli psychiatric services.
  - Evaluation of the functional classification system in swimming for CP subjects.
  - Evaluation of physical fitness in disabled Israeli athletes.
  - The effects of wheelchair sports on medical complications of wheelchair users.
  - The effects of physical activity programs in vocational rehabilitation centres and in psychiatric hospitals.
  - The effect of a swimming and physical exercise program on asthmatic children.
  - Subjective evaluation of disabled veterans: their psychosocial and motor states before and after participation in a physical exercise program.
  - Enhancement of self-efficacy in disabled adolescents through participation in an adapted tennis course.

Research activities are usually initiated by staff members or by students of the Zinman College, and carried out at different rehabilitation centres around the country.

Scientific organisations, such as the Israeli Medical Society and the Israeli Association for Sport Psychology and Sport Sociology, are very interested in presentations of APA topics during their annual meetings.

These research works are important not only for their academic outcome but also since they increase the awareness to the importance and effectiveness of it in the public and the authorities.

## **7. Reference**

- Etgarim-Challenge. <http://www.etgarim.org>
- The Israel sport center for the disabled. <http://www.iscd.com>
- The Wingate Institute for Physical Education, Israel  
<http://www.wingate.org.il>
- Israel Foreign Ministry of Foreign Affair. <http://www.state.gov>