

EDITORIAL:

**Adapted Physical Activity: the journey to Ithaca goes ahead
[Actividad Física Adaptada: el viaje a Ítaca continúa]**

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The question about “What is Adapted Physical Activity -APA-” elicited such responses as gymnastics, dance, movement, exercise, sports, games, recreation, and physical education, among others. Hutzler and Sherrill (2007) described international perspectives concerning terms, definitions, and meanings of APA as (a) activities or service delivery, (b) a profession, and (c) an academic field of study. These authors concluded that APA should probably continue to thrive as a profession whether it is considered a cross-disciplinary field of study (or discipline) or a sub-specialization of physical education (PE), sport science, or kinesiology. From a sport science perspective, APA is defined as “research, theory and practice directed toward persons of all ages underserved by the general sport sciences, disadvantaged in resources, or lacking power to access equal physical activity opportunities and rights” (Sherrill and Hutzler, 2008, p. 91).

APA has been attributed to being a meeting point between pedagogical and therapeutic concepts (Kiphard, 1990). Therefore, it is likely that developments in the medical and educational scholarly framework will affect this field of inquiry (Hutzler, 2011). In 1977, APA started a journey (to Ithaca?) thanks the establishment of the International Federation on Adapted Physical Activity (IFAPA), and this area had a continuous evolution and development, with a cross-disciplinary approach and a growing participation of the Physical Activity and Sport Sciences.

In Spain, last three decades gave us a legacy in APA areas such as education (e.g. inclusion in physical education, attention to students with special needs, development of new education contents), sport (development of paralympic sports, activity by sports federations for athletes with disabilities), therapy (physical activity programs in rehabilitation centers, involvement of health-related professionals), leisure (development of the inclusive sport approach and attitudes change programs), or sport management (sponsorship of paralympic athletes, APA services in the community, or the start of cooperation among sports federations -specific and non-specific for athletes with disabilities- for the inclusion of “para-sports” in their structures). Then, many educators and professionals in

APA contributed to the development of this area, till its inclusion in official education and professional programs in physical activity and sports: Degree in Physical Activity and Sport Sciences, Degree in Occupational Therapy, Tech in Animation in Physical Activity -TAFAD-, or Sport Federations Education Programs. Also, we have witnessed the birth of several foundations, associations and companies that increased the offer of APA services.

Last editorial about APA in the International Journal of Sport Science was titled “Research in adapted physical activity and sports: a road still to go” (Pérez-Tejero, 2009), and new steps have been trodden in Spain last five years. Pérez-Tejero, Reina and Sanz (2012) published a review about the research activity in APA in our country, discussing the challenges that APA should face in this journey, including a growing research activity that includes evidence-based practice (EBP), aiming to use the current best research evidence with regard to practice. For example, Centre of Inclusive Sport developed a strong activity to promote inclusive sports in different settings as schools, professional training or sport clubs/associations (Pérez-Tejero, 2013), linking practice, education and research. Also, raised the Spanish Association on Adapted Physical Activity and Sports (AEDAFA: Reina, Mendoza, Sanz, and Pérez-Tejero, 2013), with the aim to contribute to the compilation and organize information in adapted physical activity and adapted sports.

Glancing at the recent past, one of the most important contributions in APA last decade was the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, known more commonly as ICF (WHO, 2001), that provides a standard language and framework for the description of health-related states. ICF is a multipurpose classification intended for a wide range of uses in different sectors, from sanitary and healthcare services to paralympic sport (Tweedy and Vanlandewijck, 2011). This classification poses what a person with a health condition can do in a standard environment (their level of capacity), as well as what they actually do in their usual environment (their level of performance).

These domains are classified from body, individual and societal perspectives by means of two lists: a list of body functions and structures, and a list of domains of activity and participation.

In ICF, the term functioning refers to all body functions, activities and participation, while disability is similarly an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. This was a radical shift about the understanding of the disability from emphasizing people's disabilities to their level of health. In other words, ICF put the notions of 'health' and 'disability' in a new light.

Although benefits of physical activity and sports have been frequently documented, engaging in a healthy lifestyle with a disability could be a daunting task, because physical activity generally requires elements of strength, endurance, balance, and coordination that are taken for granted (Rimmer and Marques, 2012). In people with disabilities, one or more physical attributes might be affected, which limits access to sport, fitness, and work or household-related physical activity. Lack of exercise is a serious public health concern for all people, but people with disabilities are at much greater risk of the serious health problems associated with physical inactivity (Rimmer, Schiller, and Chen, 2012). Also, personal and environmental barriers associated with disability restrict access to physical activity venues and services. Personal barriers include pain, lack of energy, self-consciousness about exercising in public, and the perceptions that exercise is too difficult (Phillips, Flemming, and Tsintzas, 2009). Environmental barriers include transportation, lower opportunities, lack of accessible exercise equipment, unqualified staff who cannot modify or adapt individual and group classes, programs and equipment costs, and discriminatory practices (Jaarsma et al., 2014).

A preliminary analysis of the 236 abstracts submitted to next European Conference on Adapted Physical Activity (EUCAPA: October 2014, Madrid) shows an interesting distribution among thematic areas of the conference: a) Adapted Physical Activity as a tool for inclusion (30.9%); b) Participation in Physical Education (13.3%); c) Sport for persons with disabilities: from organizational inclusion to elite performance (19.7%); and d) Health and rehabilitation to promote personal autonomy and social participation (36.1%). This conference is a good "thermometer" about the interest that professionals, scientists and practitioners have actually in APA field, and inclusion and health topics accumulate 66% of received abstracts.

APA encompasses participation in many kinds of settings (inclusive, partially inclusive, and separate) throughout the lifespan. Although there will always be a need for more separate or adapted physical activity services, the fact that programs are offered sparingly in most communities throughout the world, especially

in poorer countries where there are limited resources devoted to the care and wellbeing of people with disabilities (Barnes and Sheldon, 2010), lends itself to the need for more inclusive physical activity programs that provide elements of adaptation for people with disabilities.

Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that adults and children with disabilities must have access to recreational, leisure, and sporting activities in both inclusive and disability-specific settings (United Nations, 2006). The outcome of inclusive physical activity communities is a society that respects and values the rights of all to have equal access to physical activity. Hence, society has to promote an inclusive approach to community programs and services that recognizes and supports the needs of people with disabilities. As an example, from November 2013 till October 2015 universities from Ireland, France, United Kingdom, Spain and Czech Republic are working in the project "European Fitness Inclusion Training for Work" (EFIT-W), in order to develop resources to educate professionals that could work fitness with persons with disabilities.

There is a sense of urgency in promotion of physical activity among people with disabilities worldwide (Rimmer and Marques, 2012), and professionals from many fields and with different backgrounds actually work in health-related APA. With this scenario, Bouffard (2014) advocated the potential benefits of more frequent interdisciplinary conversations, including but are not limited to, a deeper appreciation and understanding of different ways of thinking, an expansion of the traditional boundaries of inquiry, creativity, and the inclusion of different insights into body of knowledge and practices in APA. However, these types of conversations are not always easy due to habits of thought acquired during education that contain disciplinary assumptions (ontological, epistemological, methodological, ethical), about how research ought to be conducted, and ideas about how research results should be interpreted (Strober, 2011). Also, other key factors that hinder interdisciplinary conversations include an inability, or unwillingness, to carefully listen, the perceived superiority of certain types of inquiry, and issues of power (Szostak, 2014).

Cavafy's (1883-1933) famous poem *Journey to Ithaca* reminds us the importance of the road and what we learn as we walk. That poem talks about the need to adapt to new environments, socialize with very diverse people, learn from different cultures and understand how what you know and think is limited and need to learn a lot to get a more accurate overview of life and the world. Then, APA professionals should be knowledgeable, respectful, and supportive of others approaches while striving for maximum sharing of ideas. This way, APA will continue to grow as a cross-disciplinary discipline, and will continue the journey to Ithaca.

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