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**Sport
Empowers
Disabled
Youth**

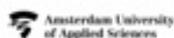
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Report inventory phase

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What we've learned from the inventory Sport Empowers Disabled Youth (SEDY)

The main goal of the SEDY project is to promote social inclusion and equal opportunities for youth with a disability by empowering them through sport and to increase sport participation for children and youth with a disability. This is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities¹ (2006), which states that individuals with disabilities hold the same rights and should have the same opportunities as those without disabilities. Concerning sports, the convention aims to encourage and promote the participation of persons with disabilities and equal access to participation in play, recreation, leisure and sporting activities. At this moment, this equal access for youth with a disability is not the case in all participating countries.

In the first meeting concerning the inventory phase the definitions to use in this project were discussed. It was decided to focus on youth (starting from school age (around 6 years, this varies in the different countries) until 23 years old) with any kind of disability. Sport is in this project defined as all those sports that are available for children with a disability, including recreational sports (for example cycling, walking, running, dance, yoga), grass root sports (for example football, basketball, volleyball) and adapted sports (for example goal ball, wheelchair dance, basketball). In this project physical activity like walking and cycling to school or shops and activities as gardening were not defined as sports. Moreover, PE in school curricula is excluded in this project definition of sport.

In this report, the results of the inventory phase are discussed. The goal of the inventory phase was to collect data on the current and desired situation concerning opportunities for children and youth with a disability to do sport activities (supply) and their needs regarding sport (demand). In the inventory phase in each country interviews were conducted and a literature review was executed in order to get insight into the current and desired situation regarding supply and demand of adapted physical activity (APA). Furthermore, based on a questionnaire filled in by youth or their parents, data were gathered about sports participation, experiences with adapted sports and the contentment about the supply of adapted sports. Thereafter, each country has identified the best practices to increase participation in adapted sports for youth in their country. During the project, the results of the inventory phase were discussed in partner meetings.

In the first partner meeting, our project was visualized with the SEDY tool (see figure 1), which shows the different aspects of increasing physical activity of young persons with a disability. The first actions were taken at the bottom of this tool with the inventory on how supply of sport opportunities for young people with a disability is organized and what their demands or needs on adapted physical activities are. In this report, the results of the inventory phase are discussed, closing with the conclusions for the development of the pilots.

¹ <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=290>

Overview SEDY project

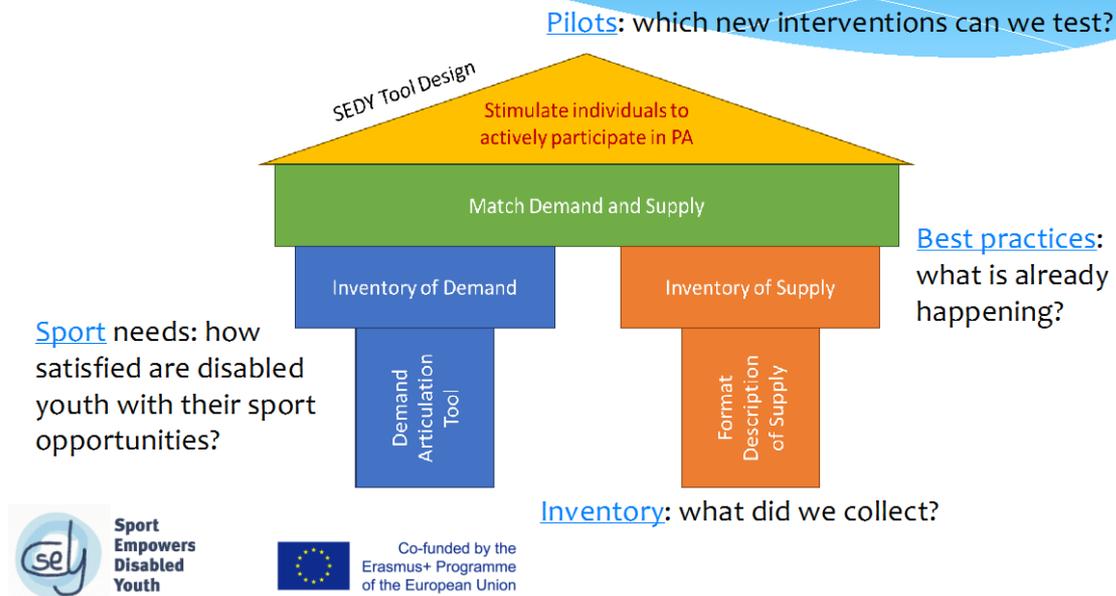


Figure 1. Model overview SEDY project

Highlights of factsheets

In the inventory phase interviews were conducted per country in order to get insight into the current and desired situation regarding supply and demand of adapted physical activity (APA). Per country at least four professionals were interviewed, from which at least two had insight into the demand of APA of the target group and at least two had knowledge on the supply of APA. To complement the interviews a literature review was executed per country to collect additional data. This resulted in [factsheets](#) per country, in this section the highlights of the findings per country are presented.

Organization of sport

Sport for young people with disabilities is organized differently in every country involved in the project. In some countries, it is only organized nationally by the Paralympic committee, but in most countries (e.g. Finland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) sport is organized on three different levels: **Nationally** by the national Paralympic committees, but also by national disability sports organizations who focus more on health enhancing physical activity and recreational sports. In the Netherlands, the process of organisational integration started in 2000 when 44 sport federations got responsibility for adapted sport in their own sport. In Portugal, able sports federations are increasingly taking over the organization of national competitions of adapted sports and integrating athletes with special needs and/or disabilities. In France 60% of the mainstream sports federations have nominated a “sport and disability” manager. **Regionally** sport is organised by different sport councils, for example in the United Kingdom where there are sport councils for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. **Locally** sport is organized in schools and communities. For example in Finland there are approximately 100 municipal Adapted Physical Activity (APA) instructors, who organise local APA services for the residents. The APA instructors are an important link between public and voluntary as well as a link between disability-specific and the mainstream services.

Numbers/data

In all countries where data on participation in sports was present it can be seen that children with disabilities are less physically active and participate in sport less than their non-disabled peers. Within the target group, differences in participation between boys and girls and between different age groups are present.

While data about sports participation of youth with a disability is measured in a lot of countries, these data are possibly not accurate and thereby not comparable. Firstly, the definition of sport and physical activity and the definition of the target group differs per country. Secondly, the availability of data in different organisations or environments could possibly result in an overestimation or underestimation of sports participation. For example, in Portugal there is data from special needs schools or from disability sports federations regarding adapted sports. Sport and physical activity participation, including informal or non-competitive leisure time sports and physical activity and all sports practice and competitions not under the umbrella of disability sports federations was not measured.

Barriers/facilitators

Children and youth with a disability want to be included in meaningful competitive sport, have the opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, sport that they would enjoy, be valued team members alongside their peers that do not have a disability, and be given a chance to show that they can achieve great things in sport (Youth Sport Trust, 2015).

Barriers

Sport participation by children with physical disabilities is a complex phenomenon because children, their parents and professionals report different barriers. A number of barriers are seen: in the UK, key barriers include a lack of suitable equipment and accessible facilities, poor transport, communication barriers, and the negative attitudes of others. In the Netherlands barriers on sport participation are dependency on others, parents lacking sufficient information about sports facilities and negative family's attitudes. The most mentioned barrier for people with an intellectual disability is a lack of staff and volunteers. In Finland there is not much information on the barriers to participation in sport faced by young people with disabilities. However, we do observe that this might be explained by the fact that children and youth with significant disabilities seldom participate in sports in the mainstream clubs or groups. Students in special schools may often think they are unable to do sports in the mainstream. The child may not have friends to go and do sports with. Parents may protect children from bullying and discrimination. The sports system itself is often exclusive.

Objective and representative data on perceived barriers and facilitators for sports participation is not available in Portugal. Caregivers seem to feel increased need of support, namely social support, which can help them take care of children with disabilities, particularly for those who are limited in autonomous mobility (Almeida & Sampaio, 2007). This may be assumed, as an important barrier for engaging in physical activity. In France barriers and facilitators to participate in sport vary greatly. Accessibility, proximity and qualified supervision appear to be the main barriers. Many mainstream clubs do not have any skilled and qualified staff to welcome youth with a disability. In Lithuania, most of the barriers for participation in sport are transportation problems, the lack of instructors and assistances, the lack of accessible facilities as well as the poor economic situation.

Facilitators

In Finland, the most important facilitators for participation are a short distance between the club and the home or school, good transportation arrangements, accessibility, safety, qualified instructors and assistants, the availability of aids and equipment, small group sizes, and a good atmosphere within the group. Also, personal attitudinal factors have an influence on the participation to the clubs such as; the child is self-motivated to learn new things, the parents have confidence in the instructors, families' active lifestyle and the parents trust that the child does not get teased or discriminated in the club. Younger children are more actively involved in sports than older people, and boys participated more in sports than girls. The boys are more physically active if they have strong global self-esteem. Among the girls the link between global self-esteem and the amount of daily physical activity does not exist. In the Netherlands the family, relatives, friends and mentors are the most mentioned stimulators for sport participation. In the UK, key facilitators include access to a wide range

of activities, opportunities to take part in sport alongside non-disabled peers but also just with other children and youth with a disability, accessible facilities, appropriately skilled staff, affordable activities, and sufficient information (Beresford & Clarke, 2009). In France parents have a vital role in sport participation for transportation and prioritise the benefits of sport. In Lithuania research indicated intrinsic motivation as an important factor for sport participation. The main thing is the parents' attitude, they lack information about possibilities, are ashamed.

What are the popular sports?

Overall the sport wishes of children with disabilities are not different from their non-disabled peers. They want to play the sports that are popular in their own country. When in Finland sports clubs were asked about services for participants with a disability (Saari, 2015) the sports mentioned most often were football, swimming, gymnastics and dance. In addition to those, equestrian, judo, floorball, basketball and figure skating are popular sports among young people with disabilities. Young people with a disability in England take part in a wide range of different sports. Swimming and football were the most popular, followed by cycling and gymnastics (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2014).

System to guide children into sports

The system in how to guide children with disabilities into sports differs a lot from the countries involved. In some countries not a lot is arranged. Parents and children have to find out their sport opportunities by themselves. In other countries there are websites to find a suitable sport. And for example in the Netherlands rehabilitation centres and hospitals have a sport desk, which gives information about sport opportunities. Other strategies are focussing on schools where children get information on sport through special school programs like for example in the Netherlands the Special Heroes project and in the UK, Project Ability. In Finland there are different ways to provide information on sport opportunities for children and youth with a disability and their parents and family. At the national level, VAU, along with the national sport federations that have included disability sport within their scope, serve as information channels on disability spots. The UK has a range of programs to help guide young people with a disability into sport. Parasport helps them identify a suitable sport and find a local disabled sports club. The School Games² inspires young people to take part in competitive school sport and includes meaningful opportunities for young people with a disability. Many National Governing Bodies also have programs to encourage young people with a disability to participate in their sport. And for many people with a disability, the National Disability Sports Organizations are another starting point to get involved in sport. To our knowledge in Portugal there is no formal system for guiding children into sports. The guidance of children into sports is done on an informal way, sometimes case by case in different settings by parents counselling, by teachers, therapists, doctors, friends, family and others. In the course of the SEDY project the Portuguese Paralympic Committee made available a new online tool to help people find adapted sports opportunities in each country region. This online tool is called the Sports

² The School Games targets all primary and secondary school children and young people (between the ages of 4 and 20 years old). It is made up of four levels of activity: competition in schools, between schools, at a county/area level, and a national level.

Inclusion Map ([Mapa da Inclusão Desportiva](#)) and is similar to what already exists in other European countries. This tool stands now as an important part of the guiding system of children into sports.

In Italy, there are many online information services to inform and introduce young people with disabilities in sports, for example www.abilitychannel.tv. Charity institutions and schools promote information and possibilities for sport participation. In Lithuania there is no systematic infrastructure to guide children and youth with a disability into sport. Some assistance is provided, for example consulting services, organisation and provision of psychological assistance to children and youth with a disability and their family.

What's happening in schools?

What we see in the countries involved is that schools play an important role when it comes to raising physical activity levels in youth with disabilities. In the UK young people with a disability have opportunities to take part in competitive sport both in school and outside of school, however they are more likely to take part in competitive sport in school, compared to outside of school (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2014). This highlights the important role that schools play in offering young people with a disability competitive sporting opportunities. In Finland the focus in schools is towards inclusion. It is the duty of the municipality and the individual school to include pupils with special educational needs in the mainstream educational system. The state-owned special schools are today national development and service centres, which provide expert services for other schools and their personnel. Finnish Schools on the Move is a national action programme aiming to establish a physically active culture in Finnish comprehensive schools. Schools and municipalities participating in the programme implement their own individual plans to increase physical activity during the school day. In France in order to match the needs of young people with a disability, federations sign partnerships with actors of the sport in schools. The role of the teacher is crucial.

Best practices

All of the countries involved in the project determined best practices (see Table 1) to give youth with a disability a chance to participate in sport. Some of these practices are based in schools and focussed on how to bring youth to sport, for example Special Heroes (the Netherlands). These programs do not only create a safe environment to sport, but also change the school policy by structurally incorporating the sport in the school program. Some other best practices focus on developing adapted sports, for example Landscape Therapy and Recreational Centre (LTRC, Lithuania), a centre fully adjusted for persons with reduced mobility where active physical, social and rehabilitation camps are organised. Another category of best practices consists out of guidelines or websites to bridge the gap between sport demands and opportunities, for example Handiguide des Sports (France), a tool specially designed to help youth with a disability to find a sport club or structure close the their homes that fits them. You will find a description of all the best practices on our [website](#).

Table 1. Best practices per country

Country			
NL	Special Heroes	Uniek Sporten	
UK	Project Ability	Inclusive Futures	Play Unified
PT	CPP – Portugal Paralympic Committee	Associação Salvador	Swimming Portuguese Federation (FPN)
FI	Swimming consultation	Municipalities projects	Valtteri School Onerva'
IT	Tuttingioco	Fidal Athletic club Rima	Handiamo!
FR	Handiguide	Actions of the Region Pays de la Loire	PASS-Sport Handijeunes – Handisport Lorraine
LT	Landscape Therapy and Recreational Centre (LTRC)	Health and integration club "Sauliukas".	Lithuanian Special Olympics

Adapted Physical Activity demand

The last aim of the inventory was to get insight into the opinions of children with disabilities on their sport opportunities at the moment. Therefore, via a questionnaire filled in by youth or parents/carers in all participating countries data was gathered about sports participation, experiences with adapted sports and the contentment about the supply of adapted sports.

The questionnaire was filled in by 888 children and youth from all participating countries. Figure 2 (N=822) shows that not even half of all children think that sport providers are offering them the best experience, 35 percent does not agree with that and 16 percent does not know if sport providers are offering them the best experience.

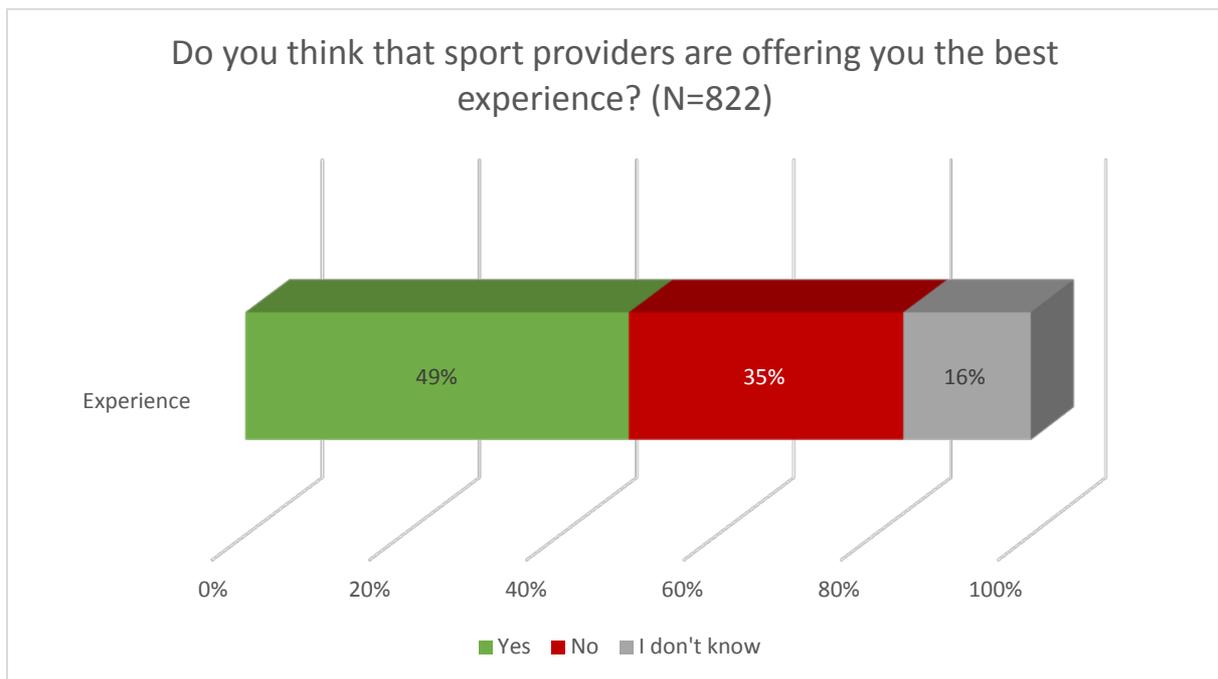


Figure 2. Satisfaction about sport experience

The explanations why children think sport providers are (facilitators) or are not (barriers) offering them the best experience can be split up in environmental factors and personal factors. In Table 2 and 3 the explanations (coded terms of their statements) are shown in order of number mentioned (the upper statements are most frequently provided).

Table 2. As a young person do you think that sport providers are offering you the best experience? Environmental factors – Facilitators are on the left, barriers on the right. Statements are shown in order of number mentioned.

Environmental factors	
Facilitators	Barriers
Professional help/good coaches	There is no suitable or limited supply/offer
There is enough choice or enough information	We need more opportunities
I like activities with my friends/teammates/made friends	I don't know (where to find) offer
	There are not enough good coaches
	Transport problems/travelling distance

Table 3. As a young person do you think that sport providers are offering you the best experience? Personal factors – Facilitators are on the left, barriers on the right. Statements are shown in order of number mentioned.

Personal factors	
Facilitators	Barriers
Sports is fun	I can not play sport/have no experience/do not play sport
A description of sport	I am not able to answer
Has an experience	Not for people like me/I can not be included
It brings me to a higher level/learn more skills	I only practice in school
I can keep fit	
Good experience	

Of all children that filled in the questionnaire 58 percent are playing sport at an official sports club, more than half of them participates in competition. Almost half (44%) is playing sport that is not at an official sports club or in school. The most popular sports both in an official sports club and outside an official sports club are soccer, basketball and swimming. More than 22 percent of all children do not play sport at all. Children who are playing sport at an official sports club are playing sport more frequently than children at a non-official sports club. More than 38 percent of the children at an official sports club are playing sports more than once a week against 28 percent at a non-official sports club. And more than 58 percent of all children at an official sports club are playing sports once a week, while 43 percent of all children at a non-official sports club are.

Thereafter, the children were asked to rate their agreement with statements about sport. The results are shown in Figure 3. Children are most satisfied about having fun and playing sports with friends. Although it was a difficult question (24 percent of the children did not answer), 50 percent of the children indicate that sport gives them more self-esteem which possibly shows the empowering abilities of sports. Children were less positive about their choices of sport opportunities, support from sport clubs and travelling to sport.

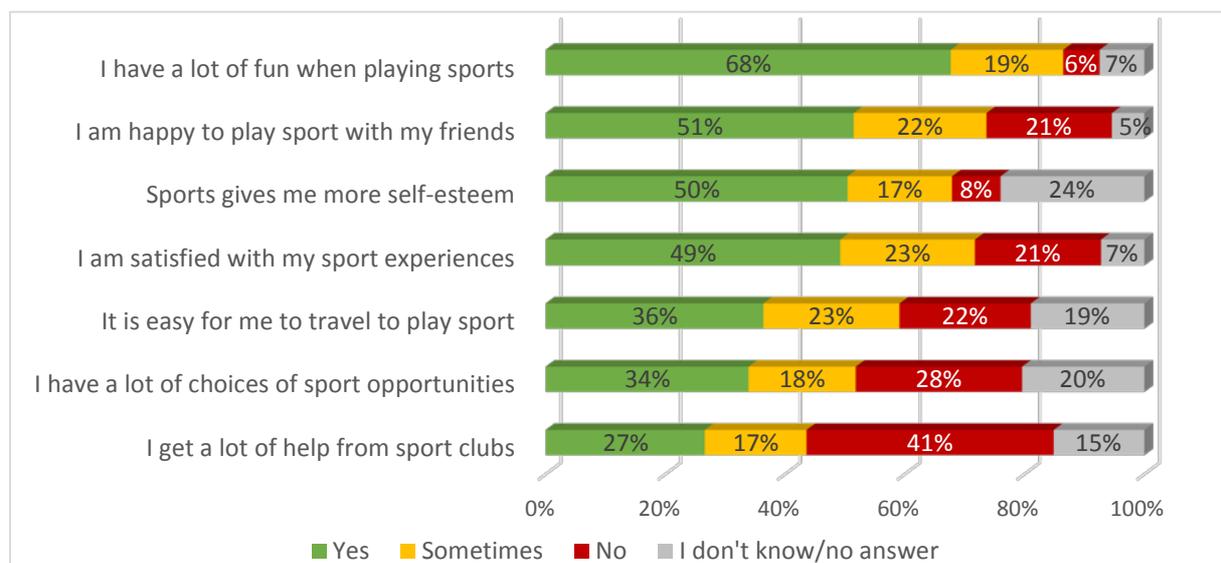


Figure 3. Agreement with statements about sport.

Summary of findings

In this report, the results of the inventory phase of the SEDY project are shown. The data on the current and desired situation concerning opportunities for children and youth with a disability to do sport activities (supply) and their needs regarding sport (demand) was gathered and discussed in partner meetings. The most striking findings are as follows:

Finding 1 We need to further define constructs and methodology in order to collect systematically comparable data concerning sport for youth with a disability in the EU

Obtaining reliable statistical data on sports participation of children with a disability in all partner countries was not an easy task. There is no standard method in the EU to collect data on this matter. In all countries other definitions were used and the data was collected in various manners. For the SEDY project [a pilot methodology](#) was developed that helped to obtain, where possible, some comparable data. Other EU countries can use our method to analyse the situation in their own country. The obtained data can be found in the separate [factsheets](#) and can be used by stakeholders.

Finding 2 in some countries data on a national level on sports participation of children with disabilities is not available.

Systematic and comparable data collection should be routinely implemented in order to allow the monitoring of this important public health and life-changing tool, which is sport, particularly in the population of children with disabilities. To date in some countries data on a national level on sports participation of children with disabilities is not available.

Finding 3 In all countries involved, we see that children with disabilities are less physically active and participate in sport less than their non-disabled peers

Sport for young people with disabilities is organized differently in every country involved in the project. In some countries it is only organized nationally by the Paralympic committee, but in most countries involved it is organized on different levels (nationally, regionally and locally). In all countries involved we see that children with disabilities are less physically active and participate in sport less than their non-disabled peers.

Finding 4 No difference in preference for sport between youth with a disability and their non-disabled peers

Looking at the sport wishes of children with disabilities it can be concluded that they are not different from their non-disabled peers. They want to play the sports that are popular in their own country.

Finding 5 Important role for schools in guiding youth with a disability towards sport

The system in how to guide children with disabilities into sports differs a lot from the countries involved. In some countries not a lot is arranged. Parents and children have to find out their sport opportunities by themselves. In other countries there are websites to find a suitable sport or dedicated programs to support young people. We further see that that schools play an important role when it comes to raising physical activity levels in youth with disabilities.

Finding 6 Inclusion as the key starting point

Increasing the awareness of the importance of inclusion and help changing the concept of children with disabilities, from the old view that these children have problems and can only be addressed by specialists to a more contemporary social approach in which it is recognized that all children have different capacities, strengths and limitations, including those with disabilities, and anyone just needs to get to know the individual capacities of any child to be able to work with and address that child. In some countries it appears that some people from communities still think under the philosophy of the medical model and feel like only specialized therapists can work with children with disabilities. Some may even be afraid of working with children with disabilities (fear of the unknown). Inclusion of children with disabilities in and through sport could benefit from a broader approach that may help changing mindsets of sport agents and overall communities.

Finding 7 Indications of empowering abilities of sport

Children are most satisfied about having fun and playing sports with friends. Moreover, half of the children indicate that sport gives them more self-esteem which possibly shows the empowering abilities of sports. Children were less positive about their choices of sport opportunities, help from sport clubs and travelling to sport.

Finding 8 individual and qualitative approach is needed

We see in the inventory phase that barriers for sport participation by children with disabilities is a complex phenomenon because children, their parents and professionals reported different barriers. So we have to make sure to listen to individual children on their sport wishes and opportunities. The use of the APA demand questionnaire showed us that the target group is really diverse and it is not easy for them to fill in questionnaires. So we need a more qualitative approach for finding out their wishes.

The next steps

By finishing the inventory phase information was obtained on the current situation concerning supply and demand of sports for children with disabilities. From the questionnaire appeared that only 49% of the young people with a disability are satisfied with their sport opportunities. Moreover, it has been shown that barriers for sport participation by children with disabilities is a complex phenomenon because children, their parents and professionals reported different barriers. So we have to make sure to listen to individual children on their sport wishes and opportunities. So that's the reason we focused on an individual approach in our **first pilot** the Personal Adapted Physical Activity Instructor (PAPAI). In which students from sport related universities act as a personal coach for a child with a disability to find a sporting hobby. The pilot was done in Finland and continued in three other countries (The Netherlands, Portugal and Lithuania) as a **second pilot** in a light version. The other thing we've learned from our use of an APA demand questionnaire is that the target group is so diverse and it's not easy for them to fill in questionnaires. So if we want to hear their own voices we should use other ways and a more qualitative approach. The UK's Youth Sport Trust developed and tested the **third pilot** "Focus on me". The pilots are clearly described and the handbooks of the pilots are available on the [website](#).

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