

European University Diploma in Adapted Physical Activities

Irene de Benedictis, Italy

EUDAPA – THE FACTS

BACKGROUND

The European University Diploma in Adapted Physical Activity (EUDAPA) has been provided by Haaga-Helia University since the academic year 2009-2010, but its story originally begun in the late '90s. EUDAPA in fact is the result of the inspiration from the former DEUAPA (Diplôme Européen Universitaire en Activité Physique Adaptée), that used to be organized in Brussels, Milano, Bordeaux and Paris.

STRUCTURE & OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME

The structure of the EUDAPA program is tailor-made on the base of the skills that the students need to acquire in order to meet the needs and the demands of the working life.

The intensive 13 weeks' programme, in fact, consists of three main features:

- 1) Theoretical and practical lectures given by the leading APA-experts in Europe and in Finland
- 2) Visits to relevant Finnish institutions that are pertaining to the field of APA (e.g. rehabilitation centre, prison, psychiatric hospital)
- 3) 5 to 7 practical projects in which the students will be entirely in charge of the organization of each project, thus allowing them to put into practice the skills that they have been taught in theory (John Dewey: Learning by Doing).

EUDAPA – THE EXPERIENCE

As a former student of EUDAPA 2014 I can indeed give my testimony of the importance and the impact that this program has had on me and on my classmates from the professional as well as from the human point of view.

INSPIRING PROFESSIONALS

From the professional point of view, EUDAPA was not only educational but was also very inspiring. Each week, we received professional training in APA by experienced teachers, both from Finland and from other countries. We had the unique chance to see and experience different APA practices, techniques and activities, some of which really had an impact on us students. Moreover, most of the teachers who join the EUDAPA programme are indeed international leaders in the field of APA, therefore we not only received a high quality training, but we also had the chance to closely interact with and to be directly inspired by distinguished professionals.

PRACTICE – IN FIRST PERSON

As in many other fields, also in APA, the practice and the experience is the thing that counts the most. In fact, we not only learned the theory and the practice of instructing and organizing APA activities, but we also had many chances to experience ourselves the things we were learning to instruct. As a matter of fact, we were guided to experience the various activities not only from the mere point of view of the professionals that we will become, but also from the point of view of the people that we will work for. We were put in their shoes (even if partially) to gain deeper insights of the

skills we need to develop in order to become valid professionals, providing a good quality of service and care to meet the needs of our future clients.

CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

The EUDAPA program is indeed the perfect expression of a multicultural learning environment. In the group of EUDAPA 2014 we had the luck of having students with a wide variety of nationalities, including e.g. ERASMUS students: three students from Spain, two students from Ireland and Czech Republic, one from Bulgaria, Italy, Turkey, and Austria.

Among the teachers, the variety of nationalities was even wider, including 'ERASMUS' teachers from Spain, Czech Republic, Ireland, UK, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Turkey, and Bulgaria. Thanks to the European Union the variety of nationalities of the group of students provided a unique chance to constantly benefit from a multicultural environment which stimulated all of us to open our minds to question our viewpoints, challenged us to gain an understanding of, and improved our skills to interact in a multicultural environment – both as persons and as professionals.

We all had done APA activities previously in our home Universities, so we could also exchange the insights of the APA practice in our different countries. Moreover, this exchange was much more amplified during the lessons with the various international teachers. This factor has an influential importance. The APA practice in Europe still has much room for improvement and it's still a field under development. Therefore it is crucial that, while forming the future



professionals, they are provided with international contacts and chances of interactions, which will stimulate the present and future European network of professionals. This will facilitate the international cooperation, and thus ultimately will serve as a stimulus for continuous development.

HUMAN EXPERIENCE & MUCH MORE

Being provided with a high quality education is a unique chance for a student and future professional. Nonetheless, the

thing that ultimately counts the most is the person behind the professional – and this – I would dare to say – is especially important in the field of APA, because of the sensitivity, creativity, flexibility and empathic skills that this job often requires.

Beyond all the high quality facilities, beyond the distinguished teachers, the wide variety of activities and the trips it was the close human interactions we had with our teachers, among us students and especially with our “clients” that had the greatest impact on us, stimulating

a deeper growth not only from the professional but also from the personal and private point of view. This priceless outcome is not something that can ever be learnt from a book, nor is it a predicted outcome of each high quality educational programme.

Nonetheless, in EUDAPA, this outcome seems to have always been the main motivation of an APA programme that is much more than merely educational, and all of us students can just be grateful for





the precious work done by Jyrki Vilhu, together with the cooperation of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences and the many unique APA professionals that have shared with us much more than just their professional knowledge.

Bibliography

- Vilhu, J. 22.7.2013. EUDAPA. Congress presentation. ISAPA congress 2013. Istanbul, Turkey.
- Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences website: <http://www.haaga-helia.fi/en/education/eudapa?userLang=en>
- ISAPA 2013 website: http://www.isapa2013.com/files/CV_Jyrki-Vilhu_en.pdf

In the picture, Jyrki Vilhu at the EUCAPA conference in Madrid in September 2014, with some of the former EUDAPA students from the academic years of 2011, 2013 and 2014, who were present at the conference as volunteers.

Beyond EUDAPA – The EUCAPA Experience

EUCAPA is a conference of Adapted Physical Activity which is held biannually in Europe. In 2014 the EUCAPA conference was organized by the Centre for Inclusive Sport Studies (CEDI) in Madrid (Spain), and 10 former EUDAPA students joined the conference as volunteers, two of which also presented their own research in the field of APA.

Apart from being a wonderful experience itself and a chance to re-inforce even more the already strong relationships among us students, the conference brought the multicultural environment, the interactions with APA professionals and international leaders, and the creation of new network, to a totally new level.

