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# SEDY<sub>2</sub> project

A hobby finder online platform as a tool to match supply and demand within adapted sports

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The Finnish Paralympic Committee, 2021



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## A hobby finder online platform as a tool to match supply and demand within adapted sports

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## Introduction

The Erasmus+ Sport Empowers Disabled Youth 2 (SEDY 2) project addresses the topic of encouraging inclusion and equal opportunities in sport for children and young people with a disability. One of the aspects we found on the meaning of inclusion in sport is that children and young people with a disability want to have a choice in sport. But where to find them?

Anyone looking for a new hobby starts the process by searching for suitable options and service providers. When it comes to seeking hobby possibilities within applied sports and physical activity, there are many factors complicating the process. Even though people have access to more information than ever before, the information is often scattered across the internet and people with disabilities or functional limitations might not be aware of where to seek information and what could be suitable sporting options for their needs within reasonable distance from home. Also, not all sport clubs and other actors offer applied physical activities or special groups and those who do are not reaching their target groups through their traditional marketing and communication channels.

This report about online search platforms as a support for those seeking applied sport possibilities is done for the EU-funded Sport Empowers Disabled Youth 2 (SEDY2) project, that aims to find solutions to problems related to lesser participation and lower physical activity levels of children and youth with disabilities compared to peers without a disability. The report describes existing online platforms that makes it possible to search for applied sporting possibilities with possibilities to limit the search results by selected criteria, aiming to tackle the problem where people struggle to find the service providers and vice versa.

## Existing hobby finder platforms online

There are examples of national online platforms with a search function that gather information about adapted sports and physical activity opportunities on one site. Examples of these kind of sites are “Löydä oma seura” (Find your own sports club) in Finland, ParaMe in Sweden and UniekSporten in the Netherlands. These three are examined more closely in this report as they are reasonably comparable due to their similar objectives and functions. Links to the websites are listed below:

- “Löydä oma seura”, Finland: <https://www.paralympia.fi/palvelut/loyda-oma-seura>
- “ParaMe”, Sweden: <https://para-me.se/>
- “Uniek Sporten”, the Netherlands: <https://www.unieksporten.nl/>

In the next chapter, the Finnish “Löydä oma seura” online service and its functions are explained more closely.

# The Finnish online service “Löydä oma seura”

“Löydä oma seura” (Find your own sports club) is a Finnish online service in which sport clubs, associations, municipal and other sport and physical activity providers with readiness and resources to include persons with functional limitations into their activities can register their information. The service and the information provided there can then be utilized by people and other actors looking for or offering adapted sporting possibilities across the country. The service is coordinated by the Finnish Paralympic Committee.

The idea with the web-based service is to gather actors and operators providing sports for people with disabilities or functional limitations in one place. The service was created as a response to a situation where supply and demand do not match – children and youth with disabilities and their families might not be aware of where one could find a suitable hobby. Also, sport providers are not effectively reaching people with functional limitations through their traditional marketing channels.

## Search function

The service works with a Google Maps -based search platform. The search function can be limited based on selected criteria, as in location, sport, target group or age group. In addition, one can specify whether they are looking for activities with focus on recreational or competitive sports or if they prefer to find a special group tailored for their needs or participate in an open group. Establishing the limitation criteria and categories, especially the target group categories, was challenging, as it is not really possible nor practical to include a fully comprehensive range of possible conditions and diagnoses given the diversity of them. The selected target group categories include the following: autism spectrum, transplant recipients, (people with) intellectual and developmental disabilities, hearing-impaired, physically challenged, visually impaired, learning disabilities and long-term illnesses.

In reality, only very few service providers offer activities exclusively to one of these target groups. In most cases, the service providers have not considered their target groups with such accuracy and as the suitability of the activity is assessed individually with anyone wanting to participate, it is not even necessary or appropriate.

The search function displays the results meeting the selected criteria by distance, so the first ones on the list are the closest ones to the selected location. In case a location is not set, the service providers are listed alphabetically. The search results can also be displayed geographically on a map.

## Club cards

Every actor and service provider in the online service has their own “club card”, with information they provided when registering for the online platform via an online sign-up form. The information can be updated anytime using the online form. Club cards can also include more detailed information about the hobby location or time, for instance.

The first version of the “Löydä oma seura” service was launched in autumn 2014 when the former Finnish Sports Association of Persons with Disabilities (VAU) renewed their website. Simultaneously, a “Löydä oma seura” -listing where service providers were listed according to region and sport was created. The online service was updated to its current form in autumn 2017. Today, the online service is coordinated by the Finnish Paralympic Committee as they merged together with VAU in the beginning of the year 2020.

The service providers have been gathered to “Löydä oma seura” by contacting the national sport federations, municipalities, local disability associations and sport clubs and asking them

## 6 A hobby finder online platform

to spread the word or – in case of actual sport providers – directly register to the service. The problem with this kind of approach is that the information in the “club cards” gets outdated as

time passes. The sport providers are asked once or twice a year to check their information in the site and fill the update form if needed.

### A brief overview of the design and functions of the Finnish “Löydä oma seura” service

**Löydä oma seura**

Tälle sivulle pyritään kokoamaan urheiluseurat ja muut toimijat, joissa on jo vammaisurheilijoita tai erityistä tukea tarvitsevia liikkuja tai joilla on valmiuksia ja haluaa ottaa heitä toimintaansa.

Jos haluat ilmoittaa uuden toimijan Löydä oma seura -palveluun tai päivittää siellä jo olevan toimijan tietoja, se onnistuu täysin maksutta sähköisellä lomakkeella. [Siirry Löydä oma seura -ilmoittautumis- ja tietojen päivityslomakkeeseen.](#)

Kaikki palaute, jonka avulla pystymme kehittämään palvelua edelleen, on tervetullutta. Sitä voi antaa sähköpostilla lauri.jaakkola@paralympia.fi.

**Sijainti** Lähellä minua  
Esimerkiksi "Harjavalta" tai "00200"

**Laji** Valitse Sport

**Kohderyhmä/vammaryhmä** Target group/ limitation category

- Valitse
- Autismin kirjo
- Elinsiirron saaneet
- Kehitysvammaiset
- Kuulovammaiset
- Liikuntavammaiset
- Näkövammaiset
- Oppimisvaikeudet
- Pitkäaikaissairaat

**Ikäluokat** Valitse Age group

**Link for service providers to register their information**

**Hae** 467 tulosta

Edellinen 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

Figure 1. The Finnish “Löydä oma seura” website and its functions

# Comparison and best practices

Although the Finnish “Löydä oma seura”, Swedish “ParaMe” and Dutch “Uniek Sporten” have similarities, they also feature different approaches and functions. In this chapter, the similarities and differences of these online services are discussed to identify best practices and introduce improvement ideas for anyone wanting to create a similar platform or develop an existing platform.

## Search function and selection criteria

The possibility to limit the search based on selected criteria is a core element in all three online services. They all have a search function with which the user can limit the search based on chosen criteria, such as location, sport and target group. This is essential considering that the field of adapted sports covers a variety of special needs and limitations. So the search feature is an important tool that helps the users personalize the results to best match their individual needs and for the sport providers and other actors to reach the right target groups. All search results can also be displayed on a map, which makes it easier to locate the nearest hobby locations.

The Finnish “Löydä oma seura” is quite strongly based around and focused on the search feature while “ParaMe” and “Uniek Sporten” seem to be more comprehensive in their contents and features. Also, these two are based on their own websites while the Finnish “Löydä oma seura” is included as a service in the Finnish Paralympic Committee’s website. A separate website enables tailoring the contents and layout and including other relevant information within the field of adapted sports that is easily accessible for all users. For example, the Dutch “Uniek Sporten” provides information about financial matters and adaptive equipment and news within the field, and the Swedish “ParaMe” features an ‘upcoming events’ section which makes timely events more visible. Linking relevant information together and preferably even in one place could be highly beneficial also in Finland, where the information exists but is much more scattered.

## Additional information

“ParaMe” has also included introductions of various adapted sports on their sites, which makes it easier for a person with disabilities or limitations to familiarize themselves with different sports. If one gets interested in the sport, a link to sport providers close to a set location can be found on the same site. This is an example of clever design of the service, helping users from different starting points and background knowledge to find information in different ways. A distinguishing feature of “Uniek Sporten” is that the site offers comprehensive tools and guidance for sport providers on how to start or develop adapted sports and activities. The Finnish Paralympic Committee has similar materials, but they can be found as their own unit on their general website, so the search service and these materials are not directly linked. Bringing them together could potentially facilitate getting a more comprehensive overview of the field of adapted sports and bring the people searching for sporting possibilities and actors providing them closer together.

## Individual sports

A great feature of the Swedish “ParaMe” website is that it also provides a lot of information, tools and ideas for those wanting to be physically active on their own, without engaging in group sports or club activities. “Uniek Sporten” also offers the opportunity to download the “Uniek Sporten Thuis” (Uniek Sporten at home) application to start physical activity at home. Of course, team sports and other group activities add the social aspect to physical activities, creating social contacts, developing communication skills and offering other benefits within the social context, but emphasizing that also individual sports and activities are as valuable forms of exercise is equally important, as group activities are not for everyone.

### Accessibility of the website

When it comes to accessibility issues in web-based services, the Dutch “Uniek Sporten” also provides possibilities to make the site more accessible for people with various disabilities, such as options to change the color contrasts on the site or using voice-overs for the written texts. Considering the target group and users of the service, this is a great feature, especially when it’s easily accessible at all times when browsing the website.

### Up to date information

It is advisable to pay attention to how the service providers can update their information on the site after registering. In the Finnish “Löydä oma seura” service providers wanting to update their information can use the same form they did when uploading their information. For now, changes done to information on the Finnish “Löydä oma seura” service need to be done manually by the Finnish Paralympic Committee. This means that it might take time for the new, accurate information to be uploaded to the site. This process could be facilitated if the updates were either completely or partly automated.

The Dutch “Uniek Sporten” have made contracts with local sports advisers who are often employed by a municipality or a local sports service to ensure that the data from the sport clubs is correct and up to date. The Swedish “ParaMe” instead is connected to the CMR system which is a common platform for all the Swedish Sport Federations. When the clubs update their information to the CMR it automatically updates it to the “ParaMe” as well. In Finland there is a similar system called “SuomiSport” but “Löydä oma seura” is not at least yet compatible with it. Some Finnish municipalities have agreed to keep the information of their local sport providers updated in the “Löydä oma seura”, but this is more random than in the Netherlands where the system is based on contracts. For “Löydä oma seura” there are annual (or twice a year) requests for the clubs to check that their information is up to date, but it is clear there are some room for improvements in the “Löydä oma seura” updating approach compared to “ParaMe” and “Uniek Sporten”.



# Summary

To summarize, it is important to keep the core objectives in mind when creating or developing a website or an application and its content and features. Based on the comparison of online services within the field of adapted sports, the core objective is to gather information about actors on the field in one place with features that help the users to search and limit the search

results according to their needs. A platform that is easy to use, accessible and providing relevant information within adapted sports and activities, serves both people looking for adapted sports and actors providing them. Naturally, the outcome is dependent on resources that are available for the project and the interests of the actor or actors coordinating the service.





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