

# The process of integrating Polish sports communities

## Proces integracji polskich środowisk sportowych

**Joanna Sobiecka**

Department of Movement Rehabilitation, University of Physical Education in Krakow, Poland

### Key words

integration of sports communities, nationwide sports organisations for the disabled, Polish sports associations, sport for the disabled, expertise

### Abstract

The purpose of the research was to present an opinion regarding the present state and changes occurring in Polish sport for the disabled as a consequence of a process of integrating Polish sports communities after the Act of Sport, June 25 2010, went into effect, in order to develop the expertise required by the Ministry of Sports and Tourism. The study included a total of 895 people (177 women, 718 men), who constituted 95.9% of respondents planned for the research from two sports communities. The first group, 573 people (115 women, 458 men), were the representatives of associations and unions conducting training exclusively for competitors with a disability. The second group, 322 people (62 women, 260 men), were representatives of Polish sports associations operating in one specific sports discipline for both able-bodied athletes and those with disabilities. Overall, the study included: 613 athletes (142 women, 471 men) from the national team with a sight or locomotive dysfunction from all disciplines practised in Poland, 143 coaches (16 women, 127 men) of Polish national teams, 120 board members (18 women, 102 men) and 19 chairmen (1 woman, 18 men) from nationwide sports organisations in which people with disabilities train on a daily basis. A diagnostic survey method was employed, utilising an authorial questionnaire entitled „The process of integrating Polish sports communities”. The questionnaire included the following thematic areas: integration of sport for the disabled with the sporting community of able-bodied people, positive aspects and problems occurring in sport, and the forms of assistance expected by sports associations, unions and Polish sports associations, to facilitate training for athletes with disabilities. Furthermore, there were issues concerning the rights and obligations of athletes qualified to the national team and their coaches, with whom athletes with disabilities would like to cooperate. Respondents also considered how to promote and develop sport for the disabled and how athletes might comply with the training requirements of Polish sports associations. The organisational and substantive preparations of Polish sports associations were also highlighted in terms of assuming responsibility for athletes with disabilities who train in individual sporting disciplines. Finally, the differences in training for people with disabilities in Polish sports associations and organizations dealing exclusively with sports for the disabled were also analysed.

### Słowa kluczowe

integracja środowisk sportowych, ogólnopolskie organizacje sportu niepełnosprawnych, polskie związki sportowe, sport niepełnosprawnych, ekspertyza

### Streszczenie

Celem przeprowadzonych badań, które posłużyły do opracowania Ekspertyzy dla potrzeb Ministerstwa Sportu i Turystyki, było przedstawienie opinii na temat stanu i zachodzących zmian w polskim sporcie niepełnosprawnych, jakie mają miejsce w procesie integracji polskich środowisk sportowych, po wejściu w życie ustawy o sporcie z dnia 25 czerwca 2010 roku. Badaniem objęto łącznie 895 osób (177 kobiet, 718 mężczyzn), które stanowiły 95,9% respondentów zaplanowanych do badań z dwóch środowisk sportowych. Pierwsza grupa – 573 osoby (115 kobiet, 458 mężczyzn) – to reprezentanci stowarzyszeń i związków prowadzących szkolenie sportowe wyłącznie dla zawodników z niepełnosprawnościami. Druga grupa – 322 osoby (62 kobiety, 260 mężczyzn) – to przedstawiciele polskich związków sportowych, funkcjonujących w jednej określonej dyscyplinie, zarówno na rzecz zawodników pełnosprawnych jak i z niepełnosprawnościami. Ogólnie w badaniach uczestniczyło:

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The individual division of this paper was as follows: A – research work project; B – data collection; C – statistical analysis; D – data interpretation; E – manuscript compilation; F – publication search

Article received: 25.04.2020; accepted for publication: 03.07.2020

Please cite as: Sobiecka J. The process of integrating Polish sports communities. Med Rehabil 2020; 24(1): 35-45. DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0014.3559

Internet version (original): [www.rehmed.pl](http://www.rehmed.pl)

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613 sportowców (142 kobiety, 471 mężczyźni) z dysfunkcją narządu wzroku lub narządu ruchu kadry narodowej, ze wszystkich dyscyplin uprawianych w Polsce, 143 trenerów (16 kobiet, 127 mężczyzn) reprezentacji Polski współpracujących ze sportowcami, 120 członków zarządów (18 kobiet, 102 mężczyzn) oraz 19 prezesów (1 kobieta, 18 mężczyzn) z ogólnopolskich organizacji sportowych, w których na co dzień trenują osoby z niepełnosprawnościami. We wszystkich badaniach posłużono się metodą sondażu diagnostycznego, wykorzystując autorski kwestionariusz ankiety pt. „Proces integracji polskich środowisk sportowych”. Badania obejmowały następujące obszary tematyczne: integrację sportu niepełnosprawnych ze środowiskiem sportowym osób pełnosprawnych, pozytywne aspekty i problemy występujące w sporcie, a także formy pomocy oczekiwane ze strony stowarzyszeń, związków i polskich związków sportowych, które ułatwiłyby uprawianie sportu zawodnikom z niepełnosprawnościami. Poza tym w sferze zainteresowania pojawiły się zagadnienia poświęcone prawom i obowiązkom sportowców powoływanych do reprezentacji narodowej oraz trenerów, z jakimi chcieliby współpracować zawodnicy z niepełnosprawnościami. Rozpatrywane były również działania podejmowane w zakresie upowszechniania i rozwoju sportu niepełnosprawnych oraz możliwości podporządkowania się zawodników do wymagań procesu szkolenia, jaki obowiązuje w polskich związkach sportowych. Zwrócono też uwagę na przygotowania organizacyjne i merytoryczne polskich związków sportowych pod względem przejmowania zawodników z niepełnosprawnościami, trenujących poszczególne dyscypliny sportowe. Ponadto kwestią analizy były różnice występujące w szkoleniu sportowców w polskich związkach sportowych, a organizacjach zajmujących się wyłącznie sportem niepełnosprawnych.

## INTRODUCTION

„*The integration of people with a disability is a social process aiming at inclusion of disabled people in the social life of able-bodied people, and activities leading to the full opening of the community of non-disabled people to those with disability, expressed in mutual cooperation, acceptance and a sense of community*”<sup>1</sup>. With regard to the foregoing opinion, it should be stressed that sports activity is an important part of social life.

After analysing the domestic literature covering our subject for discussion, it was concluded that the process of integrating Polish sport communities proceeds very slowly. It was also noted that its progress over several dozen years was the product of the totality of conditions related to political, social and economic changes taking place in Poland<sup>2,3</sup>. One must understand the modest beginnings of sport for the disabled, and how various circumstances which have influenced its development.

In the early years (1949-1960) sport for the disabled remained in a closed circle composed largely of medical staff and educators, and struggled to gain the attention of the able-bodied sports community. Consequently, it was closely associated with the activity of rehabilitation centres and treatment and pedagogical institutions<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, there was no interest from the contemporary public authority in sport for the disabled. This can be seen in the resolution adopted by the communist authorities that was to provide the grounds for developing a model of physical education

in Poland, which contained no directives regarding physical education or sport for the disabled<sup>5</sup>.

Over the following years (1961-1989) conditions improved little. Sport for the disabled was present only in cooperatives, functioning in the Sport Association of Labour Cooperatives “START” (Polish - Zrzeszenie Sportowe Spółdzielczości Pracy, ZSSP “START”). Disabled sports continued to exist in an isolated community. This was reflected in the lack of interest shown by local and central authorities (including sports), mass media, poor access to modern technical and technological solutions, and limited international contact. These observations are confirmed by the results of research conducted among Polish Paralympic athletes. Over 90% of athletes competing in the Paralympics from years 1972-1988 found that sport for the disabled was excluded from the sports community of able-bodied people. Less than 10% of respondents perceived a mutual acceptance of among the sports communities<sup>6</sup>.

It is noticeable that symbolic recognition of sport for the disabled came only after many successes by Polish representatives in international arenas in the years 1965-1979<sup>7,8,9</sup>. It was expressed in the decision of the chairman of the Main Committee of Physical Education and Sport (Polish – Główny Komitet Kultury Fizycznej i Sportu, GKKFiS) from December 29, 1979 to bestow upon the “START” association the rights of a leading organisation in a programme of organisational activity for sport for people with disabili-

ties<sup>9</sup>. This event proved to be highly significant for sports for the disabled, particularly for the Paralympic competition, since GKKFiS was the central authority of the state administration responsible for promoting and developing physical education. The chairman of GKKFiS also offered his personal recognition for Poland’s Paralympic athletes. During the official departure ceremony he handed Polish athletes the fifth Olympic Circle as a symbol of nomination for the national Paralympic team. Moreover, for the first time in the history of Polish Paralympic sport, for the results obtained in the 1980 Olympic Games in the Netherlands – by decision of GKKPiS chairman from July 15, 1980 – the representatives were awarded gold, silver and bronze medals “For Outstanding Sporting Achievements”<sup>10</sup>. Henceforth, ceremonies involving state representatives for conferring the Paralympic nominations and awarding medals became tradition.

Nevertheless, throughout this era representatives of sport for the disabled courted contact neither with the sports associations of individual disciplines nor with the Olympic community. The indifference of that community towards the Paralympic sport, evidenced in the statements of the Olympic Games participants from years 1972-1988<sup>6</sup> is therefore unsurprising. There were some worthy exceptions, however, including the representatives of Polish Archery Association (Polish – Polski Związek Łuczniczy, PZŁucz). Governed in their decision only by the athletes’ sporting achievements, they

appointed Tomasz Leżański, a disabled archer, to the national team to the Olympic Games in 1972<sup>11</sup>.

Substantial progress in integrating Polish sporting communities occurred only later, in the years 1990-1998, and triggered by the transformation of the political system in Poland and the sudden collapse of the cooperative division (Polish - pion spółdzielczy), then the main workplace for people with disabilities. Individual cooperatives suffered serious economic difficulties and could no longer finance sports activities. Such conditions forced fundamental transformations in the structure and management of sports for the disabled. Thereby, in 1994, there was a favourable situation for the Main Council of the Cooperative Sports Association "START" (formerly ZSSP "START"), which had no obligations towards the cooperatives, to transform itself into the Polish Sports Association for the Disabled (Polish - Polski Związek Sportu Niepełnosprawnych "Start" (PZSN "Start")). Significantly, integration with the sports community of able-bodied people became an aim for PZSN Start and one of the ways to fulfil this was to include sports for the disabled in the scope of the Olympic idea and activity<sup>12</sup>. By taking on the commitments made, PZSN "Start" established contacts not only with other nationwide organisations dealing with sports activities for disabled people, but also with disabled athletes training in clubs with able-bodied athletes. Examples include the Paralympians from the 1996 Atlanta games who fought the nominations in: archery, volleyball, swimming, wheelchair tennis, table tennis, wheelchair fencing and sailing<sup>13</sup>.

A further important event occurred on April 7 1997 when, for the first time, by decision of the Board of the Polish Olympic Committee (Polish - Zarząd Polskiego Komitetu Olimpijskiego (PKOl)), the Commission of Paralympic Games was impanelled in PKOl, whose chairmanship was entrusted to the then chairman of PZSN "Start"<sup>14</sup>.

Positive changes in the perceived integration of both sports communities were recorded by some Pol-

ish Paralympians from years 1992-1998<sup>15,16</sup>. The data show that the group of Paralympians observing signs of integration in Polish sport increased to 19% from the approximately 10% of participants of the Olympic Games from years 1972-1988. Nevertheless, during this period Paralympians continued to express predominantly negative opinions regarding the integration of sports communities.

Over time, however, there emerged a need to unify measures on a national level. This resulted from the fact that, despite numerous nationwide sports organisations (around 76 in 1998<sup>17</sup>) working towards sport for the disabled, most of the athletes training there were excluded from competition for Paralympic nominations. Only athletes in sports training within the structures of PZSN "Start" enjoyed this privilege since this was the only representative of Polish sport for the disabled recognised on an international stage. This was primarily due to regulations of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) (Polish - Międzynarodowy Komitet Paraolimpijski (MKPar)), which stated that countries should be represented on its forum by a single organisation<sup>18</sup>. In these circumstances, the institution of the Polish Paralympic Committee (Polish - Polski Komitet Paraolimpijski (PKPar)) that linked clubs of sports associations for the disabled and started to fully meet international obligations in this area proved crucial for Polish sport. Thereby, it effectively influenced the further development of Paralympic sport in later years<sup>19</sup>.

From February 2, 1999, the PKPar took over the duties of PZSN "Start", becoming also the representative of the nationwide associations at the local, national and international level<sup>19</sup>. Notably, along with instituting PKPar, national team athletes expected further progress in merging the two sports communities<sup>16,20</sup>. Unfortunately, as opposed to MKPar, the authorities of the newly created Polish committee did not include in their objectives any declaration aiming towards cooperation with PKOl and integration with the sports community

for non-disabled athletes. This perhaps explains why the body of athletes who felt there was a discernable integration of Polish Paralympic sport with the sports community of able-bodied people increased only modestly to 27% in the 2000-2002 Games and to 31% by 2004-2006. It should be noted this systematically conducted research regarding changes in the integration of Polish sport included only athletes within the Paralympic community who at that time had the opportunity to train in sports organisations exclusively for persons with disabilities<sup>16,20</sup>.

It is recognised that the development of Polish sport is, in many of its spheres, dependant to a large extent upon the strategy adopted by the ministry to which this sport directly reports<sup>21</sup>. Interestingly, in 2005, the Ministry of Sport (MS) made an important announcement regarding equal treatment of all athletes. This was published in the Regulation of the MS on December 29, 2005<sup>22</sup>. Then, in the Regulation of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism (MSiT) of January 26, 2009<sup>23</sup>, members of both the Olympic and Paralympic teams achieving high sports results in international competition became entitled to scholarship financed by the state budget.

Further action was taken in Polish parliamentary acts of 2006<sup>24</sup> and 2010<sup>25</sup>, by which competitors with disabilities were granted cash awards for medals won at the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games from 1972. The cited acts took on ground-breaking significance when, from January 2009, the amount of the awards for medallists of the Paralympic Games (PG) became equalised with that of their Olympic counterparts<sup>26</sup>.

When examining the process of integrating the two sports communities it is worthwhile considering the expertise regarding "Sport of the disabled in Poland and in the world" developed under the supervision of prof. Andrzej Kosmol from the University of Physical Education in Warsaw, for the need of the Ministry of National Education and Sport (Polish - Ministerstwo Edukacji Naro-

dowej i Sportu (MENiS))<sup>27</sup>. The findings, in particular in the community of Polish Paralympians over the years 1972-2002<sup>6,15</sup>, became a source for discussion and indications of the work needed in this field. The appointment of a person (or a department) in MENiS was recommended, to coordinate cooperation between sports centres for able-bodied people and sports for those with disabilities. It was further proposed, as a first step, to subsidise the clubs and sports centres forming the community of able-bodied people and organise regular recreational and sports activities also for people with disabilities, and to promote cooperation among the aforementioned organisations at a district sports association level. It was also emphasised that MENiS would give preference in their subsidies to able-bodied sporting activities, at all levels, with equal participation of athletes with disabilities<sup>27</sup>.

In 2007 the Ministry of Sport published "Strategy for the development of sport in Poland to the year 2015". Another critical step in the integration process, one of its stated priorities was to improve sporting achievements in Olympic and Paralympic disciplines. As a result it was considered appropriate to create sports divisions for athletes with disabilities in the clubs of Polish sports associations. Efforts were directed not only on "...the best possible development of sports disciplines for the disabled, but also their integrative nature..."<sup>28</sup>.

Whilst this process of integration was supported by certain guidelines included in the strategy<sup>28</sup> and also in the earlier expert opinion<sup>27</sup>, they were not the only steps taken in this respect. Some commentators associated with disabled sports contend that the entry into force of the Act on Sports of June 25, 2010<sup>25</sup> was the key moment in connecting Polish sports communities.

The guidelines in the Act<sup>29</sup> required that, from 2010, there was created a further, and now legal, framework for integrating competitive sport for able-bodied athletes with sport for the disabled. At the same time Paralympic sport came under the care of the Competitive Sports Depart-

ment of the (MSiT) on similar terms and conditions to Olympic sport. Further, the act mandated organisational changes in the structure of Polish sport for the disabled, including the necessity to conduct training in single discipline unions.

The legal requirements are also considered to have been important for the further development of Polish sport for people with disabilities. Particularly as the increasing demands posed by competition at the highest level in some disciplines have led to the formation of independent, international sports organisations<sup>29</sup>.

It may also be supposed that the encouraging activities of the MSiT in this area were motivated primarily by efforts to integrate the sports communities. The effects of this undertaking were evident already in 2011. For instance, the Polish Equestrian Federation (Polish - Polski Związek Jeździecki), first extended its activity and formally began to implement activities in the area of disabled sports. In the following years, more associations committed themselves legally, integrating sport for the non-disabled with sport for people with disabilities. These are: Polish Canoe Federation (Polish - Polski Związek Kajakowy) (2012), Polish Billiard Association (Polish - Polski Związek Bilardowy) (2013), Polish Tenpin Bowling Federation (Polish - Polski Związek Kręglarski) (2013), Polish Table Tennis Association (Polish - Polski Związek Tenisa Stołowego) (2013), Polish Tennis Association (Polski Związek Tenisowy) (2013), Polish Taekwondo Federation (Polski Związek Taekwondo Olimpijskiego) (2013), Polish Yachting Association (Polski Związek Żeglarski) (2013), Polish Archery Federation (Polski Związek Łuczniczy) (2014), Polish Triathlon Association (Polski Związek Triathlonu) (2014), Polish Basketball Association (Polski Związek Koszykówki) (2014), Polish Badminton Association (Polski Związek Badmintonu) (2014)<sup>30</sup>.

In discussing decisions taken in Poland by its sports associations, one further event cannot be omitted. In its 16th year of operation the PKPar formally began its collaboration with

the PKOl. The ceremonial signing of the agreement between the chairmen of those organisations – Łukasz Szeliga (PKPar) and Andrzej Kraśnicki (PKOl) – took place on December 14, 2015 on the premises of PKOl<sup>30</sup>.

## AIM OF THE STUDY

Taking into consideration the described determinants, the research aim was to present an opinion on the present state and changes occurring in Polish sport for the disabled, within the context of the process of integrating Polish sports communities after the entry into force of the Act on Sport of June 25, 2010<sup>25</sup>.

## MATERIAL AND RESEARCH METHODS

### Characteristics of the participants

The studies included in total 895 people, i.e. 177 women and 718 men (Table 1 and 2). They were representatives of two sports communities.

The first group of respondents represented the associations and unions providing sports training exclusively for female and male athletes with disabilities – 573 persons, i.e. 115 women and 458 men (Table 1).

The second group of respondents came from Polish sports unions operating in one specific discipline, aimed at both able-bodied competitors and those with disabilities – 322 persons, i.e. 62 women and 260 men (Table 2).

Overall, the research involved:

- 613 athletes of the national team (from all the disciplines practiced in Poland), characterised by dysfunctions of visual or locomotive organ – i.e. 142 women and 471 men; they represented 97.3% people of the total group of athletes considered for the research;
- 143 coaches of the Polish national team, collaborating with athletes with disabilities of visual or locomotive organ and those with mild intellectual disability, practicing summer and winter sports disciplines (i.e. 16 women, 127 men), who represented

**Table 1**

Sports organisations	Polish nationwide organisations engaged in sport training exclusively for athletes with disabilities*									
	Respondents									
	Athletes		Coaches		Board members		Chairmen		Together	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Polish Sports Association for the Disabled „Start”	237	57.0	63	59.5	16	37.2	1	12.5	317	55.3
Polish Boccia Association	14	3.4	8	7.5	3	7.0	1	12.5	26	4.6
Physical Culture Association „Olimp”	38	9.1	5	4.8	6	14.0	1	12.5	50	8.7
Association of Physical Culture. Sport and Tourism of the Blind and Visually Impaired “CROSS”	74	17.8	8	7.5	2	4.6	1	12.5	85	14.9
Association of Sport for the Disabled	21	5.0	1	0.9	3	7.0	1	12.5	26	4.5
Amp Football association for the Disabled „Amp Futbol”	25	6.0	4	3.8	2	4.6	1	12.5	32	5.6
Integration Rehabilitation and Sports Association „Culani”	7	1.7	1	0.9	2	4.6	1	12.5	11	1.9
Union of Sports Associations „Sprawni-Razem”	-	-	16	15.1	9	21.0	1	12.5	26	4.5
<b>IN TOTAL</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>100</b>

\* own study after modification of materials from the Ministry of Sport and Tourism<sup>31</sup>**Table 2**

Sports organisations	Polish sports unions engaged in sport training for athletes both able-bodied and those with disability*									
	Respondents									
	Athletes		Coaches		Board Members		Chairmen		Together	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Polish Badminton Association	5	2.5	3	8.1	5	6.5	1	9.1	14	4.3
Polish Billiard Association	4	2.0	3	8.1	3	3.9	1	9.1	11	3.4
Polish Equestrian Federation	14	7.2	1	2.7	2	2.6	1	9.1	18	5.6
Polish Canoe Federation	11	5.5	5	13.5	-	-	-	-	16	4.9
Polish Basketball Association	43	21.9	4	10.8	9	11.7	1	9.1	57	17.8
Polish Tenpin Bowling Federation	39	19.8	5	13.5	12	15.6	1	9.1	57	17.8
Polish Archery Federation	11	5.5	4	10.8	8	10.4	1	9.1	24	7.4
Polish Taekwondo Federation	3	1.5	2	5.4	5	6.5	1	9.1	11	3.4
Polish Tennis Association	24	12.2	1	2.7	7	9.1	1	9.1	33	10.2
Polish Table Tennis Association	33	16.8	6	16.3	7	9.1	1	9.1	47	14.6
Polish Triathlon Union	-	-	1	2.7	5	6.5	1	9.1	7	2.2
Polish Yachting Association	10	5.1	2	5.4	14	18.1	1	9.1	27	8.4
<b>IN TOTAL</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>100</b>

\* own study after modification of materials from the Ministry of Sport and Tourism<sup>31</sup>

97.9% of the group of coaches planned for the research;

- 120 members of the boards of nationwide sports organisations, representing athletes with dysfunctions of visual or locomotive organ and with mildly reduced intellectual capacity (i.e. 18 women, 102 men); they represented 87.6% of

the group of board members designated to the research from the above mentioned organisations;

- 19 chairmen of nationwide sports organisations, where people with dysfunctions of visual or locomotive organ and mild intellectual disabilities train on a daily basis: (i.e. 1 woman, 18 men), who represented 96.4%

of people of the chairmen group planned for the research from the aforementioned organisations.

### Procedure and research tools

The presented research procedure was carried out in six stages.

### Stage I

In the first stage an authorial questionnaire was prepared, entitled "The process of integrating Polish sports communities". A separate version was developed for each group of respondents: athletes, coaches, board members and chairmen of nationwide organisations, in which people with disabilities attend sports classes<sup>32,33</sup>. The structure and content of questions included in these questionnaires, consulted upon in detail with Elżbieta Bojanowska, the Minister's Consultant in Department of Sport for All, resulted in responses for areas of the research topics presented by MSiT (see below, Results).

### Stage II

Using internal MSiT lists<sup>31</sup>, direct contact was established with chairmen of the boards of Polish nationwide organisations where, in 2016, there was training in individual sports disciplines for people with disabilities (Table 1 and 2). In a personal interview the aim and the general issues of the research were described to the chairmen (and in further stages: coaches, athletes and boards members). Permission was then sought to conduct the research not only among the chairmen, but also among the members of their boards, the coaches and athletes of the national team with disabilities of visual or locomotive organ within their organisations. The chairmen were also asked to make available the current documentation of the organisation, in order to create up-to-date lists of individuals intended for inclusion in the study (Table 1 and 2).

### Stage III

Using the documentation from MSiT<sup>31</sup> and data from the aforementioned sports organisations (i.e. Polish nationwide unions and associations operating only for the benefit of sport for the disabled and Polish sports unions, Tables 1 and 2), lists of individuals (including contacts for electronic correspondence or phone calls) planned for inclusion in the research were prepared. They detailed coaches of the Polish national team, athletes with dysfunctions of visual

and locomotive organ, or with mild intellectual disability, training in summer and winter sports disciplines, and members of the boards of those organisations.

### Stage IV

In next stage direct contact was established with all the coaches of Polish national team of sport for the disabled. From the individual conversations with coaches, coordinators of individual sports disciplines and the documentation they provided, lists of athletes from the national team were verified. Consequently, people who ended their sport career, resigned from the national team during the year because of health problems or personal issues such as longer trip abroad or the death of a close relative, or who were suspended from sports activities by the board of the association were excluded from the final list of athletes.

### Stage V

Having constructed lists of respondents for potential inclusion in the study it was possible to proceed with the survey implementation. For all participants a diagnostic survey was employed, with a questionnaire entitled "The process of integrating Polish sports communities"<sup>32,33</sup>. All interviews were preceded by detailed instructions and conducted by employees of the Department of Sport for the Disabled within the Faculty of Movement Rehabilitation at the University School of Physical Education in Kraków (dr hab. Joanna Sobiecka prof. AWF in Kraków and dr Marta Kądziołka), and employees of the Department of Adapted Physical Activity and Sport of the Faculty of Health Sciences in Katowice, Medical University of Silesia (Polish - Śląski Uniwersytet Medyczny – SUM) in Katowice (dr hab. Ryszard Plinta prof. SUM in Katowice).

After receiving their approval, interviews among competitors of the national team and their coaches were carried out during nationwide Polish sports competitions, training camps, central consultations and during weekly training sessions at their sport clubs. If ever there was

no possibility of establishing direct contact with interviewees, due to their absence during in-person meetings, a telephone interview was conducted. Following their approval, the survey was individually sent by e-mail or by traditional post (according to the wishes of respondent) to the address provided.

Among the board members of individual sports organisations operating for the benefit of people with disabilities who consented to participate, interviews were held in their place of office, work place or place of residence, or via electronic correspondence.

### Stage VI

In the final stage of the research procedure the opinions of the respondents (athletes, coaches, board members and chairmen) regarding the respective research areas were identified within the individual questionnaires. The opinions were then categorised and presented for each distinct group of respondents, with divisions into: associations, unions (Polish nationwide organisations operating exclusively for the benefit of sport for the disabled) and Polish sports unions, and division according to the sex of the respondents. The group of chairmen of the abovementioned organisations posed an exception, as there was only one woman among the respondents (the Chairman of the Association of the Physical Education, Sport and Tourism for the Blind and Visually Impaired "CROSS" (Polish - Stowarzyszenie Kultury Fizycznej, Sportu i Turystyki Niewidomych i Słabowidzących "CROSS"). Thus, in order to preserve the anonymity of the views expressed by her, the data in this group of people were shown without division by sex. For the analysis of results, the methods of descriptive statistics were used; the number (n) and the percentage level (%).

Finally, it should be emphasised that all the research stages were financed from the budget of the MSiT and were conducted with observance of ethical principles. These were formulated in the International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research

Involving Human Objects, developed by the Council for International Organisations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS), in collaborations with the World Health Organisations (WHO), adopted in 1982 and amended in years 1993 and 2002<sup>1</sup>.

## RESULTS

The analysis of the results regarding sport for the disabled was presented along several study themes requiring expert opinion. They included: the integration of sport for people with disabilities with the sports community for able-bodied people, positive aspects and difficulties encountered in sport, in addition to forms of assistance expected from associations, unions and Polish sports associations which would facilitate training for athletes with disabilities. Issues concerning the rights and obligations of athletes appointed to the national team were considered, as well as the characteristics of coaches with whom disabled athletes would like to work.

Measures taken to promote and develop sport for the disabled, the potential adaptation of athletes to the training requirements of Polish sports unions, plus the organisational and operational preparations of Polish sports unions to assume responsibility for training disabled athletes for individual sports disciplines were all assessed in further detail. Finally, differences in training were evaluated between athletes in Polish sports associations and in organizations dealing exclusively with sports for people with disabilities.

Detailed results from research are included in the Annex of Expertise<sup>34</sup>, which was submitted to the MSiT in the Department of Sport for All. However, due to limited editorial possibilities, the detailed interpretation of results from the various research areas and an analysis of the changes observed are to be presented in forthcoming scientific articles.

## SUMMARY

The expertise gathered through this research can be considered credible since it was developed upon the opinions of the people directly involved in sports activities for the disabled. For the first time in the history of Polish sport, in the broad sense of this topic, the comments of the interested parties were sought.

It is also important that representatives of both sports communities could express their views, i.e. both Polish sports unions which, in accordance with the Act, started implementing changes in the area of sport for the disabled, as well as associations and unions which continue their training provisions exclusively in the community of people with disabilities.

It should further be noted that the author of the study, at the request of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, on June 19 2017, presented to participants of a meeting of the Council of the Sport for the Disabled (Polish – Rada Sportu Osób Niepełnosprawnych, (RSON)) the results and conclusions of the research, conducted to acquire expertise upon the course of the process of integrating sports communities. However, for reasons of convenience, the conclusions discussed during an electronic presentation were also provided in paper form to all members of the Council<sup>35</sup> present at the meeting with the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. Hence, the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the findings was given to the representatives of the Senate, parliament, all-Polish sports organisations operating in the community of people with disabilities and also the National Disabled Persons' Rehabilitation Fund (Polish - Państwowy Fundusz Rehabilitacji Osób Niepełnosprawnych (PFRON)). Where necessary, the results were also cited by the author of the study during thematic discussions raised at subsequent meetings of the Council, held over the years 2017 to 2019. These occasions were signifi-

cant, recalling that one of the main responsibilities of RSON is to establish directions for the development of Polish sport for the disabled, as well as initiating, supporting and promoting new proposals in this area.

Furthermore, as part of the work on the project of Strategy for People with Disabilities, in October 2017, the MSiT shared with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (Polish - Ministerstwo Rodziny Pracy i Polityki Społecznej (MRPiPS)) collective information regarding sport for people with disabilities. The material, coordinated by the Minister's Office, included a short note acknowledging the expertise developed on the basis of empirical research into the process of integrating sports communities. Significantly, certain issues highlighted by the research were selected for inclusion in an analysis for the Strategy prepared in 2018 by MRPiPS<sup>36</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

Summarising the obtained results, conclusions were formulated in the following research areas.

### Integrating Polish sports communities

1. The sports community of able-bodied and disabled people is not integrated at present.
2. Respondents' opinions can be differentiated on the basis of the sports organisation within which they work. Positive opinions regarding features connecting both sports communities are expressed mainly by respondents within Polish sports unions.
3. Integrating the two sports communities can be achieved through: enabling common participation in training, training camps and sports competitions, greater interest on the part of the media, appropriate knowledge on the subject of sport for the disabled and its acceptance by able-bodied people.

<sup>1</sup> International ethical guidelines for biomedical research involving human subjects. Geneva: Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences, 2002 (access 7.03.2020).

4. The main reasons for excluding sport for people with disabilities from the Polish sports community are: a lack of information and promotion of sport for the disabled in the media, a lack of knowledge or acceptance by able-bodied people, and a lack of sufficient integrated sports competitions being organised.

#### Advantages of sport for the disabled

5. Positive manifestations of sports activity for persons with various dysfunctions are seen by both sports communities of non-disabled people and those with disabilities.
6. According to the representatives of Polish sports unions, the greatest advantages of sport for the disabled include: social integration (getting to know new people in the country and abroad), as well as integration with able-bodied athletes.
7. In organisations operating exclusively for the benefit of sport for the disabled, positive opinions concerned increasing of self-esteem, related with: forgetting about one's disability, a sense of independence, improved well-being, motivation for undertaking work or making difficult life decisions.

#### Problems of sport for the disabled

8. Difficulties revealed by the respondents referred to all areas associated with activity in competitive sport.
9. Difficulties were particularly emphasised in relation to organisational and financial issues, managerial and training staff, and more often so by respondents representing associations and unions conducting sports training exclusively for persons with disabilities.
10. Respondents often cited as difficulties a lack of information, the selection system for athletes with various dysfunctions for practicing sport, and a lack of understanding and acceptance of athletes with disabilities, particularly in Polish sports unions.

#### Forms of help facilitating sports training for people with disabilities

11. Positive opinion on the matter of support for people with disabilities that would facilitate their training emerged unanimously among respondents from both sports communities.
12. The most frequently suggested forms of help were: ensuring regular financial backing for training programs in individual sports disciplines and access to professional staff, in order to support the entire training process including systematic prophylaxis and medical care. In addition, respondents mentioned the opportunity to use highly specialised sports equipment and a guarantee of regular participation in competitions.
13. A further proposal put forward by the chairmen of Polish sports unions was the employment of a coordinator to deal with issues of sport for the disabled, collaborating and communicating not only with the board, but also with the coaches and the athletes.

#### Rights of athletes appointed to the national team

14. Among athletes training both in organisations operating exclusively for the benefit of sport for the disabled and in Polish sports unions was the predominant opinion that they do not know the rights recognised for persons appointed to the national team. The few athletes who expressed a positive opinion most frequently mentioned the right to use the title of national representative and to wear the national team uniform.

#### Responsibilities of athletes appointed to Polish national teams

15. The Majority of respondents with a dysfunction of visual or locomotive organ, from both sports communities, are aware of their

obligations towards the associations and unions, sports clubs, as well as towards the coaches and other people cooperating with them.

16. Athletes appointed to the Polish national team particularly emphasise: honourable representation of a given association or sport club and being fully engaged in training and participation in competitions. Additionally, important duties were identified as: respect and kindness towards the coach, competitors with whom they train and compete and towards others connected with the sport (i.e. assistants, volunteers, medical staff, psychologists, organisers and those from the technical support of competitions).

#### Professional experience of the coach – significant factor for competitors with disabilities in working with coaches

17. The respondents' opinions regarding coaches with whom the athletes would like to work are very varied.
18. Among respondents representing organisations both operating only for athletes with disabilities and Polish sports unions, there was a strong preference to work with coaching staff that have professional experience only in the non-disabled sports community. They felt the following factors influence their opinion: greater expectations placed upon the athlete, greater training opportunities and opportunities to use the coaches' experience.
19. Some athletes, particularly those from associations and unions, more highly value a relationship with a coach with professional experience only with athletes with disabilities. There, critical characteristics in coaches were: understanding of their problems, acceptance of their needs, knowledge of the specifics of their sports disciplines and being better prepared to work with



athletes with various dysfunctions of the visual or locomotive organ.

20. Among participants of the survey appointed to the National Team in Paralympic and non-Paralympic sports, there were also those for whom it did not matter in which community the coaches gained their professional skills. Most important were to have extensive coaching knowledge and experience and to optimise training.

#### **Actions taken in Polish sports communities to promote and develop sport for the disabled**

21. Among the surveyed chairmen and board members of nationwide organizations, whilst the opinions presented were varied, positive statements were most often made regarding the efforts made by the sports community to promote and develop disabled sport.
22. Representatives of Polish sports unions observe that activities to promote and develop sport in their organizations focus mainly on regular sports activities (training sessions, training camps), organising sports competitions as well as selecting coordinators who not only promote but also deal with issues of sport for the disabled and who cooperate and communicate with management, coaches and athletes. They also promote sport in the media, at exhibitions and during shows of Paralympic disciplines.
23. In terms of promoting and developing sports, other than regular training, athletes from sports organizations exclusively for athletes with disabilities most commonly cited networking and encouraging children, adolescents and adults to practice sports. They also make efforts to enable athletes to participate in national and international competitions, and select the national team in various disabled sports disciplines.

#### **Preparedness of athletes with disabilities for the training requirements of Polish sports unions**

24. In the opinion of the surveyed athletes, representatives of their national teams in individual disciplines, most athletes with disabilities are prepared for the training requirements of Polish sports associations.

#### **Organisational and operational preparedness of Polish sports unions for training athletes with disabilities**

25. The community of people operating in Polish sports unions express diverse views, both positive and negative, as to the organisational and operational readiness of their unions to work with athletes with disabilities.
26. Respondents associated with Polish sports unions feel that organisational readiness is demonstrated mainly by: the extensive experience and high level of organisational skills of those working for the unions, the ability to provide athletes with the support staff (coaching, judging, technical, and medical) and appropriate equipment and facilities for training.
27. The most commonly cited conditions aimed at fulfilling the operational needs of Polish sports associations, which enable training for athletes with various dysfunctions, are: professional coaching staff that are engaged in their work with the athletes with disabilities and understand the difficulties and needs of the particular sports discipline.
28. In addition to the positive opinions, some athletes were critical of certain aspects of the operational readiness of their organization in terms of working with athletes with disabilities. Concerns included: unequal treatment of athletes in terms of financing, disrespectful behaviour towards them on the part of the sports community, as well as the lack of appropriate provisions in the statutes of unions on activities for the benefit of disabled sport.

#### **Differences in training for people with disabilities in Polish sports associations and organizations dealing exclusively with sports for the disabled**

29. The majority of respondents, from both the coaching and competitors community of national teams from Polish sports, note differences between the training for athletes with disabilities provided by organisations dealing exclusively with sport for the disabled. However, both the positive and negative opinions within the unions vary.
30. According to both athletes and coaches, the principal advantages for athletes with dysfunction taking up training in Polish sports unions are the culture of high achievement in sporting results, together with a more professional and experienced coaching staff able to adapt training programs for people from different sports disciplines.
31. Coaches most frequently mention a lack of experience in working with athletes with disabilities, and of an individual approach towards athletes, plus a lack of interest in training for new coaching staff to understand the needs of disabled sports as the unfavourable factors faced by athletes with dysfunctions in Polish sports unions.
32. Athletes of the Polish national teams who have continued training in the Polish sports unions after the entry into force of the Act of Sport (from June 25, 2010) most often cite as a negative their lower financial assistance in comparison with organisations dealing with activities exclusively for sport for the disabled. A lack of training for athletes who are not in the National Team was also observed.
33. Only a small number of athletes and coaches perceive no differences in training in the Polish sports unions. They feel that training programs for athletes with disabilities are similar in their implementation to disciplines practiced

by able-bodied persons, and that training people with various dysfunctions requires the same provision of cooperation with doctors, physiotherapists and psychologists as in competitive sports of able-bodied people.

The materials were presented at the Ministry of Sport and Tourism – by the author of the article – at a meeting of the Disabled People's Sports Council on June 19, 2017. The author obtained written permission from the Ministry for the use of data for scientific purposes on March 7, 2018.

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## Address for correspondence

Joanna Sobiecka  
The University of Physical Education in Kraków  
Faculty of Motor Rehabilitation  
The Institute of Applied Sciences  
Department of Adapted Physical Activity and Sport  
Al. Jana Pawła II 78, 31-571 Kraków, Poland  
e-mail: j.w.sobiecka@interia.pl