

## GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH DEAF ATHLETES

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### ABSTRACT

The work was created with the desire to familiarize experts from the world of sports with the phenomenon of deafness and the culture that has developed within it. Sports occupy a special place in the Deaf community and culture. For this reason, the importance of sports activities for the deaf was emphasized and attention was focused on the contribution of the deaf in the world of sports, which developed within the phenomenon of deafness. The social role of sport and its importance in the implementation of social inclusion were especially emphasized. **The aim** of the work is to analyze the available literature in the period from 2000-2022 to determine how developed the inclusive perspective of sports is in the context of social change, such as acculturation, and to offer concrete guidelines that would facilitate familiarity and, therefore, acceptance of the peculiarities and values of Deaf culture. The following search engines were used for the literature search: Ebscohost, ScienceDirect, Wiley Inter Science and SpringerLink, KoBSON, Google Scholar. **The results** obtained from the review of the literature indicate the importance of the role of sports coaches in creating a stimulating climate, as well as that sports provide great opportunities in leveling the differences that place deafness and Deaf culture in the context of handicaps. Specific guidelines are listed and described, which not only serve to introduce sports experts to the deaf, but also to enrich the work in the world of sports, which also leads to the essential realization of social inclusion.

**Key words** : DEAFNESS / SPORTS / INCLUSION / GUIDELINES

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## INTRODUCTION

Deafness is considered to be any case of total or practical deafness in which this condition of hearing causes limitation of speech perception as well as communication abilities of a person. Total deafness implies a complete loss of hearing where a person cannot establish contact with sound even with the strongest amplification, while in practical deafness there are minimal hearing remnants, but even with the help of hearing aids they cannot be used and enable the perception and development of speech (Veselinović & Slavnić, 2015).

The limitation in gaining experiences through verbal messages led deaf people to develop other forms of communication through non-verbal communication: sign language and then the use of the finger alphabet (dactylography), mimicry and lip reading. Sign language is a natural means of expression that enables deaf people to acquire communicative, cognitive and creative experiences (Dimić & Isaković, 2018).

The term "deaf culture" is used to identify a set of beliefs, behaviors and a common language used by a group of deaf people. Deaf culture is a social, collective and creative force based on sign language. It is based on gestural speech, which members of this culture use in communication, social protocols, play, socializing, art, sports. Deaf culture is a positive term that emphasizes dignity and social identity in contrast to the terms hearing-impaired, deaf, and hard-of-hearing, which do not convey any particular pride or sense of community (Padden, 1993). The Deaf community is a diverse minority cultural and linguistic community that includes an extensive network of social, political, religious, artistic and sports groups (Žižić & Jaslar, 2014). Deaf communities are best understood as linguistic minorities rather than disability groups. After long debates, the European Union of the Deaf (EUD) decided that the linguistic field of deafness can be linked to the point of view of disability, and announced that both definitions are applicable and valid: the deaf see themselves as a cultural and linguistic minority. But at the same time, they face obstacles imposed by society, they suffer from lack of accessibility, and therefore they are also "disabled". (EUD 1997:109, as cited in Obradović, 2016).

By reviewing the literature, we see that sport is an extremely important means of communication. Sport is a source of information of public and scientific importance, which contributes to improving the position of people with disabilities (Martin, 2013). Considering that communication between people is communication, information and exchange of thoughts, and that it is precisely this that is endangered in deaf people, sport appears as a good medium for overcoming it. Communication includes, in addition to auditory, visual and kinesthetic communication, that is, spheres in which deaf people are not hindered and can use (Arsić, 2013).

Sport is a phenomenon whose positive effects contributes to raising the quality of life not only for people without disabilities but also for those with disabilities. Practicing sports activities improves physical health, mental state, degree of independence, and social relationships (Eminović, 2020). These activities are of far-reaching importance for psychophysical adjustment, for overcoming the personal feeling of incapacity, for social reintegration, for feeling strength and ability to live with the knowledge that disability does not mean incapacity (Kljajić et al., 2013).

In addition to highlighting the social role of sport and its importance in the implementation of social inclusion, **the aim** of the work is to analyze the available literature in the period from 2000-2022 to determine how elaborate the inclusive perspective of sport is in the context of social change, what is acculturation, and to offer concrete guidelines that would facilitate getting to know and therefore accepting the peculiarities and values of Deaf culture.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF SPORTS FOR DEAF PEOPLE**

Research has shown that deaf and hard of hearing athletes take their participation in sports activities to a new and completely different level. Professional and recreational deaf and hard-of-hearing athletes, by their commitment to sports and sports activities as well as their promotion, create a favorable social atmosphere in which other deaf and hard-of-hearing people can join and achieve social interactions in the way and in the environment that is most natural to them. In such an environment, they can communicate in Sign Language, receive psychological support, become sportsmen, sports directors, managers, and audiences. Active involvement in such a community raises their level of self-confidence, self-esteem and strengthens their identity. In addition, participation in various sports activities and competitions provide an opportunity for deaf and hard of hearing people to overcome psychological and physical problems as well as to raise the level of subjective experience of the quality of life (Nemček, 2020).

When it comes to deaf and hard of hearing people, it was found that participation in sports activities leads to improvements in all domains of quality of life and they achieve higher scores compared to people with some other type of disability (Nemček, 2020). When it comes to domains of quality of life, deaf and hard of hearing respondents achieved the best results in the domain of mental health, in the domain of physical health, satisfaction with the environment and finally achieved the weakest results in the domain of social relations. Weaker results in the domain of social relations could be attributed to barriers in communication that deaf and hard of hearing people encounter due to the inability to use oral speech, but also the lack of understanding of Sign language by hearing people (Crnković and Rukavina, 2012). Also, research results have shown that sports-active deaf and hard-of-hearing people have a higher level of self-esteem than those who are not, and that playing sports generally has a positive effect on their self-esteem (Nemček, 2017; Ačak & Kaja, 2016).

## **THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE DEAF IN THE WORLD OF SPORTS**

The first sports associations and competitions of the deaf appeared as a result of individual interests of the deaf in certain sports, and the competitions of the deaf developed as sports games of a mass character and high-quality competitions. The first clubs for the deaf appeared in 1888 in Berlin, and in 1922 the World Organization for Deaf Sports was founded. The Sports Association of the Deaf was founded in 1953 (Kasum, 2015).

The Olympics for the hearing impaired has a long tradition. The first summer games were held back in 1924 and were organized by the International Sports Committee for the Deaf. Later, in 1949, the first Winter Games for the hearing impaired were held. The vision of organizing the "International Silent Games", as the Olympic Games for the Deaf used to be called, is aimed at bringing together athletes with hearing impairments, in order to spread sportsmanship and exchange experiences through sports competitions. The Games have been held every fourth year since their inception, with exceptions, when they were not held during the Second World War. The very name of the Games for the Hearing Impaired has changed several times. In the period from their foundation to the summer games held in Belgrade in 1969, the games were held under the name "International Silent Games". The Winter Games had this name until 1967. In the period from 1969 to 1997 for the summer games, and from 1971 to 1999 for the winter games, the Games were called the "World Deaf Games". At the beginning of the 21st century, in

2003, the name of the games was changed to the current name - Olympic Games of the Deaf (Eminović, 2020).

Due to the nature of the impairment, as well as the way the deaf function, we can understand the reasons and the need for organizing this international, elite sporting event. The deaf see themselves as a special cultural population and community, which is powerful enough and capable of organizing its own sports events, in all categories and at all levels, and in accordance with its own cultural seal-deafness. Since its establishment, the International Sports Committee for Deaf People has been trying to follow three basic goals: 1) Development and control of physical education in general and sports through practice, especially for deaf people; 2) Promotion of relations between countries that are involved in the promotion of sports for deaf people, and which, through their influence, initiate and provide guidelines for the development of sports in countries where sports are at a lower level; 3) Supervise and organize the celebration of the World (Olympic) Deaf Games, world and regional competitions (Eminović, 2020).

With the Deaf Olympics, special emphasis is placed on ways of communication and the necessary types of support during the competition. Competitors with hearing impairment are characterized by the absence of physical disability, and the only thing that distinguishes them from competitors without impairment is the way of communication and perception of sounds in the environment (Kasum, 2015). What we can conclude is that the sports in which people with hearing loss participate do not differ significantly from the sports intended for the typical population. Adaptations and changes are minimal, and refer to alternative methods that suggest the beginning and flow of the game. At sports competitions, sound signals are replaced by light and other visual signals and symbols. The sports represented at the summer competitions are: athletics, badminton, basketball, beach volleyball, bowling, football, cycling, handball, judo, karate, golf, mountain biking, archery, swimming, tennis, table tennis, taekwondo, volleyball, wrestling (free and Greco-Roman style). At the Winter Olympics, athletes compete in alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, curling, ice hockey and snowboarding. Teams from Serbia participated in the Deaf Olympic Games in Taipei in 2009, Sofia in 2013 and Samsun in 2017, with a total of 55 competitors in individual and team competitions. The total number of medals won is three, one gold and two bronze (Eminović, 2020).

## **AN INCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE OF SPORTS**

The success that deaf people have achieved in sports suggests that we should look beyond the context of disability and handicaps that society imposes on them due to the nature of their impairments. What should be focused on are the ways of creating an inclusive environment as well as the development of guidelines for working with such athletes in favor of the essential implementation of social inclusion.

By reviewing the literature, we came across a large number of authors who studied the social role of sport, especially in the context of creating an inclusive environment. Playing sports is based on a voluntary basis and in accordance with personal affinities. Sport is characterized by complex cultural processes, based on social solidarity, rationalization, identity, environment, aesthetic regulations. It is emphasized that sport played a significant role in the fight for equality. People with disabilities, like other people, have different needs, desires and goals, but also the need to participate in sports (Eminović et al., 2009).

In order to ensure equal participation in sports and recreation, it is necessary to treat each individual with respect, to refrain from all forms of communication, contact, action or behavior that can be considered offensive (Fasting, 2014). By including people with disabilities in the world of sports and

recreation, by achieving certain positive results, it is possible to reduce the passive attitudes of the general population, which refer to the claims that people with disabilities are not able to achieve significant success and become independent (Martin, 2013).

The participation of people with disabilities in sports and recreational activities correlates to the highest extent with the quality of life, therefore it is necessary to increase the number of sports and recreational services that the community offers to this population. Disability itself, regardless of the type and causes of its occurrence, significantly affects the quality of life, which is not only the result of rehabilitation, treatment and care, but also the process of satisfying needs, realizing interests, own choices and aspirations, as well as human abilities in a changing society (Potić et al., 2014).

Sport encourages the integration of people with disabilities, both in everyday life and in the field of work, focusing on their abilities and opportunities, not on difficulties, and reducing the rate of negative attitudes in the social community (Devine et al., 2017).

Inclusion is most often interpreted as "inclusion", joining the majority, which makes assimilation inevitable. However, inclusion essentially actually represents active participation in social flows and not passive joining of an individual to society (Romstein, 2010).

Social inclusion essentially means that all individuals must be given opportunities and freedom to fulfill their social role, as well as to be trusted by other individuals to fulfill it. An individual should have the feeling that they are accepted, that is, that they belong and contribute to their community. Accordingly, interpersonal relations and participation in the life of the social community are cited as two main aspects of achieving social inclusion, which constantly overlap and complement each other (Simplican et al., 2015).

Precisely because social inclusion is achieved through relationships with others, it does not only happen on a personal level, but must also happen on a global level. However, in order for it to take place at that level, it must first take place at the individual, interpersonal, organizational and community levels. Although it often happens that a person accepts themselves, the first obstacle that is placed in front of them is that of social relations. A person, due to a lack of their own ability to establish relationships with others, and due to the attitudes of others, is often rejected and cannot progress towards social inclusion, acceptance and fulfillment of his potential. Precisely because of this, it is necessary to work on raising awareness of the environment from the very beginning, especially of peers, so that the individual has the best possible quality of life and can progress as far as possible. Social inclusion does not only contribute to people with disabilities, but also to every participant in that process, because it increases tolerance, opens perspectives and creates a stronger and better quality kind of society (Karega - Paić, 2019).

The participation of children with disabilities in sports with the typical population can be increased if members of society, especially sports organizations and clubs, schools and parents of children with disabilities, rely on the social model and jointly participate in the creation of such an environment, which will offer these children as wide a range of options as possible for the inclusion of sports and recreational activities. The offer of those options should be in accordance with the capabilities and interests of those children and not be subject to limitations of a personal or social nature (Darcy et al., 2020).

## **SOCIAL INCLUSION OF THE DEAF THROUGH SPORTS**

Based on the previously presented from the reviewed literature, we arrive at certain premises that should guide the development of social inclusion of the deaf through sports, as well as orientate on



specific guidelines that would enable work with deaf athletes in this process. Social inclusion of the deaf through sports basically means creating the conditions and atmosphere in which deaf people will be able to pursue their interests and needs, realize their sporting potential and present their culture. An inclusive approach to the deaf, when it comes to sports, means opening up opportunities for deaf people to take part in sports and recreational activities, events, competitions and manifestations on an equal basis with the hearing population. Therefore, it is necessary to organize a meeting of deaf and hearing athletes and enable their mutual cooperation without segregation frameworks and barriers, which further leads to the implementation of a new culture in the hearing population as well as the enrichment of sports teams and organizations with new, equally capable and prepared athletes (deaf athletes).

Of course, we must not forget and emphasize that we should respect the community and culture of the Deaf, i.e. their integrity and existence, as well as their decision to participate in sports and recreational activities and events within the framework of associations, organizations and the Olympic Games for the Deaf.

What we want to emphasize is that the idea of including deaf athletes in the world of hearing sports is based on the meeting of two cultures, their coexistence, mutual acquaintance, exchange of values, acceptance, cooperation. The goal is that the social inclusion of the deaf through sports goes in two directions. One direction should lead us to the point that deaf people are not seen as handicapped persons and that their sensory deficiency is not put in the foreground, but that they are perceived as unique persons, who have their own specificities and who are equally dexterous and capable of participate equally in sports with hearing impairment. Deaf people should feel safe and free to be who they are and to participate in sports with full support and acceptance from the society in which they engage in their chosen sports activities. The second direction is aimed at encouraging the hearing population to change the way and culture of thinking with an emphasis on accepting what is specific and different. Therefore, social inclusion must flow in both directions, from the deaf population to the hearing population and vice versa from the hearing population to the deaf population with the active participation of both sides. In order for the mentioned ideas to be launched and come to life, as well as for essential changes to occur, we believe that we should start with smaller, crucial steps, from basic problems such as the attitudes and relationship of the hearing population to the deaf population.

What characterizes research on attitudes towards deaf people are the fairly consistent results that speak of the existence of neutral or even predominantly positive attitudes towards this group of people, as well as the fact that these attitudes are more positive than attitudes towards people with other types of disabilities (Cambra, 2002; Emerton and Rothman, 1977; Furnham and Lane, 1984; Kluwin et al., 2002; Nikolarazi and De Reybekiel, 2001; Radoman, 1995).

Namely, similarities and differences, as well as strengths and weaknesses of members of different social groups, should be highlighted. The highest degree of generalization of positive changes in attitudes to other members of the further group is possible with this approach to marginalized groups (Dovidio et al., 2009; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005).

## **THE ROLE OF COACHES IN CREATING AN INCLUSIVE SPORTS ENVIRONMENT**

We believe that the main guideline for working with deaf athletes, which should be followed by all others, is precisely the creation of an inclusive or motivational sports environment. Existing research gives us insight into how important it is for sports coaches to participate in creating a stimulating atmosphere in which all athletes, regardless of whether they belong to a marginalized group or not, will

feel the freedom to develop every aspect of their personality. The motivational environment created by sports coaches is one of the very important factors that influence whether young people will participate in sports and recreational activities and whether they will experience them as a positive or negative experience (Schailleé et al., 2017).

The benefits of the motivational environment that sports coaches create together with peers from the team are reflected in the fact that athletes enjoy sports activities more, achieve a better connection with sports coaches and achieve enviable results (Cumming et al., 2007; MacDonald et al., 2011; Weiss et al., 2009). Sports coaches who are more oriented towards creating a motivational environment help athletes to start their internal motivation, to express their competences with more confidence, especially in sports and encourage them to invest more effort (Weiss, et al., 2009; Vazou et al. , 2006; Halliburton & Weiss, 2002). The fact that athletes strengthen and improve personal and social skills, define their goals more clearly and take initiatives with greater desire and certainty is highlighted as an advantage (MacDonald et al. 2011).

On the other hand, sports coaches who are oriented towards creating a sports environment where the priority is results and achievements and not the personal progress of athletes cause negative reactions in the team. Conflicts arise between athletes and create a negative attitude and aversion towards the coach and towards sports activities (Ommundsen et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2005).

## **GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH DEAF ATHLETES**

In the following chapter, we would like to present and interpret specific proposals and guidelines for working with deaf athletes. We have found some of the guidelines in the literature reviewed so far, but we have added or innovated some, in order to indicate that working with deaf people does not require excessive efforts, but only a different and more specific approach in which sports experts could very easily find their way. In order to ensure a non-restrictive environment for people with hearing impairment, and thus increase their possibility of participation in sports and recreational activities, it is necessary to design an adequate approach to this population, use appropriate communication strategies and know appropriate teaching and training methods and techniques. Among the recognizable elements of Deaf culture are sign language, which is preferred and valued, and face-to-face communication, as well as the visual way of receiving information (through pictures, films, diagrams, etc.) (Grujić, 2017).

The simplest and most natural communication is communication through movement. Movement directly and naturally expresses our thoughts, feelings and desires. All movements, when used in interpersonal communication, carry a corresponding message. The skill of conveying messages is reflected in the manner of holding the body, body posture, hand and head movements, gestures and facial expressions. Non-verbal communication is an equal part of the communication process and sometimes even predominant. Non-verbal communication, movement communication, often provides more information than speech itself and complements it. Deaf and hard of hearing people use mimicry, typing and gesture (sign) in their communication. Gesture is a specific human activity. It is also called kinetic speech and always follows speech. Kinetic speech includes mime, which is expressed by facial movements, pantomime, which is expressed by movements of the whole body, and gesture, which is expressed by hand movements. Very often we unconsciously resort to the use of gestures and most often we use natural, i.e. demonstrative and imitative gestures. Such gestures arise spontaneously and directly refer to beings, objects, space, essential characteristics of a person or phenomenon. In the development of deaf and hard of hearing people, gesture is of particular importance. A deaf person is a visual type and

everything they learn and experience is done through sight. Optical images that a deaf person receives from the outside world are concrete, direct, static or dynamic. They develop gestural speech based on their own spontaneous movement imitating the environment (Dimić & Isaković, 2018).

Both sports and deaf language are based on movement, non-verbal communication and kinetic speech in general. Gesture-level recognition facilitates finding a common language between the deaf and the hearing. Taking into account the above, contact and basic communication between experts from the world of sports and deaf and hard of hearing athletes do not encounter insurmountable obstacles. On well-laid foundations of communication, their joint participation and mutual functioning, in all parts of the sports process, is getting closer to creating an inclusive sports environment.

When adapting sports and recreational activities to deaf people, it is necessary to direct the focus towards an adequate selection of communication methods with a hearing impaired person, i.e. towards the application of sign language or methods of non-verbal communication, i.e. the extralinguistic and paralinguistic system, which includes the use of space, facial and body movements, touch (Houinato, 2017). Due to the lack of sound stimuli, during training in which deaf people participate, it is convenient to use different visual stimuli such as flags, pictures, posters, smart boards, concrete objects, models, light signals, as well as to rely on the demonstration method. It is necessary to enable deaf people to perceive the demonstrated activities and skills in order to understand what is shown. The demonstration of activity and motor tasks must be repeated continuously in order to enable the understanding of the trainer's requirements and to facilitate the adoption of ways of implementing sports activities (Lieberman, 2017). When adopting repetitive movements, it is especially important to apply the principle of gradualness (Vuljanić, 2015).

Reich & Lavay (2009) state some of the guidelines that can be useful in practical work with deaf people when adapting sports and recreational activities and adopting new content: 1) Establish eye contact when talking, so that the person can understand orders, read lips as well as perceives facial expression and gesticulation; 2) When demonstrating activities, stand in front of the group (representing a mirror), so that deaf people can better perceive the demonstrated activities; 3) Encourage the participants; 4) In order to make it easier for the participant to perceive both the stimuli and the demonstrated tasks, do not move around the field and in the hall without immediate need; 5) Allow deaf people to move around the field or hall, in order to find an adequate position from which to participate in the training process; 6) Repeat requests and questions, involve participants in actively searching for solutions to the tasks set, all in accordance with their capabilities; 7) Eliminate distracting factors such as unnecessary sound stimuli, inadequate and unnecessary equipment.

## CONCLUSION

By looking at the available literature, we conclude that the inclusive perspective of sports is an insufficiently elaborated topic, within which only some of the guidelines for creating an inclusive sports environment can be found. The success that deaf people have achieved in sports suggests that we should look beyond the context of disability and handicaps that society imposes on them due to the nature of their impairments. What should be focused on are the ways of creating an inclusive environment as well as the continuous development of guidelines for working with such athletes in favor of the essential implementation of social inclusion, so they can in an equal way, with the hearing population, take part in sports and recreational activities, events, competitions and manifestations. We believe that it is necessary to pay more attention to sports coaches and their contribution in working with deaf athletes in further research. Specific guidelines for working with deaf athletes are also offered. One of the key guidelines is



mastering sign language and establishing communication between the deaf and the hearing. The possibility of developing their relationship lies in non-verbal communication. It is also necessary to use different visual stimuli and rely on the demonstration method. Although certain guidelines were found in the literature and described in the paper, it is important to constantly encourage contacts between deaf and hearing athletes, because from such contacts, innovative guidelines can be initiated that could benefit all participants in the world of sports, especially sports coaches, and complement the work with the deaf athletes.

The power of social inclusion would contribute to the removal of the label "disabled athletes" and to the inclusion of deaf athletes as equal members in the world of hearing sports.

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