

# **REVIEW**

of the doctoral thesis of **BOYANA KONSTANTINOVA KOTSEVA**

Title of the doctoral thesis: "Analysis of the conditions for the development of alpine skiing for people with disabilities in the Republic of Bulgaria"

Purpose of the Review - obtaining the educational-scientific degree "Doctor" in the doctoral program "Theory and Methodology of Sports Science" in the professional field: 7.6. Sports

Scientific supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Petar Yankov, PhD

**Reviewer:** Assoc. Prof. Stefka Djobova, PhD

## **Overview of the procedure**

Justification for submission of the review: participation in the composition of the Scientific Jury for the defense of the dissertation, according to Order ZP 25 / 15.01.2021 of the Rector of the National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski" and Decision of the Scientific Jury from 15.01.2021.

The doctoral student Boyana Konstantinova Kotseva has presented a full set of documents in accordance with the Law for development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its application, and in line with the Regulations for the conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions in the NSA "Vassil Levski".

## **Biography of the doctoral student**

Boyana Konstantinova Kotseva was born on February 25, 1989. She graduated from the National Education Complex for Culture and the Italian Lyceum with a degree in Italian language and culture in Sofia. In the NSA "V. Levski" she successively acquired a bachelor's degree with a professional qualification "Coach in Artistic Swimming" and "Physical Education Teacher", and a Master's degree in the "Adapted Physical Activity and Sports" program. During her studies she participated in a number of Erasmus programs, which finally formed her interest in the field of adapted physical activity. Boyana Kotseva achieved a

significant upgrade of her qualification by participating in the program for obtaining a European Degree in Adapted Physical Activity (DEUAPA). Her professional realization is in the field of snow and water sports, and she currently works as a physical education teacher in 41st primary schools in Sofia. Boyana Kotseva's media popularity is related to the ParaKids project of the Shark Sports Club Association, when she became the winner of the competition for social entrepreneurs of CHANGE - the biggest social corporate responsibility of Nova Broadcasting Group. Under the ParaKids project, she provides sports for children and young people with disabilities, for which she has been awarded with national and international prizes.

### **Relevance of the topic**

Sports science has provided us with countless and indisputable evidence of the positive impact of sports on persons with disabilities. Sport is the most effective way to prevent and strengthen mental and physical health. Moreover, sport for persons with disabilities is an established way to reach their full potential as members of society. It helps to promote changes in public attitudes about the "ability" of people with disabilities to contribute fully to social development.

Skiing and snowboarding for people with disabilities also known as adapted snow sports have become much more widespread in recent years, as more and more organizations adopt and apply the principles of universal design and equality to empower people with disabilities to enjoy snow sports. The 2018 Paralympic Winter Games were officially the most successful in the history of the Paralympic Movement, and the Paraskiers demonstrated sporting skills and power of the human spirit and achieved unprecedented results. The success of these athletes is an inspiration for increasing participation, while the continuous improvement of the environment and facilities allows more and more people with disabilities to go out on the white tracks.

### **Structure of the dissertation**

The dissertation of Boyana Kotseva on the topic: "Analysis of the conditions for the development of alpine skiing for people with disabilities in the Republic of Bulgaria" has been written in a volume of 177 pages. Contains: introduction; three interconnected chapters; conclusions and recommendations; bibliography with 88 scientific, documentary and electronic sources. There are two appendixes in a volume of 5 pages. The content of the work is illustrated with 31 tables and 53 figures.

The structure of the work is in line with the adopted standards in the NSA “Vassil Levski ”and meets the modern requirements for the development of this type of scientific work.

### **Review on the content**

First of all, the actual and well-timed topic of the research is impressive. It provides foundation for urgent adequate actions to lead to sustainable inclusion of people with disabilities in snow sports and adaptation of the overall system for offering winter tourism in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The literature review is relatively well developed –it is based on 88 literature and internet sources. Given the fact that the topic is not well researched internationally, I believe that the number of literary sources is insufficient for a dissertation. However, the doctoral student was able to present the historical perspective and the current state and development of adapted skis. Critical overview is made on the classification system and how its changes affect the development of adapted ski at the Paralympic level.

In the chapter are presented:

- a / Functional evaluation system
- b / The historical aspects of the development of adapted skis
- c / State of development of Adapted equipment
- d / Adapted skis as a high performance sport
- e / Foreign experience and good practices
- f / Infrastructure
- g / Human resources

Here I should note that the doctoral student Boyana Kotseva has complied with the main remarks that I addressed to this part of her work in the procedure of the internal discussion of the dissertation on 18. 12.2020. The sequence of the subchapters has been changed. In this way, the literature review acquires a logical connection. The statistical data of the WHO and the NSI presented in the first subchapter give an up-to-date overview of the prevalence of disabilities, and the topic of functionality as a substitute for the old disability assessment. The doctoral student is well acquainted with the modern reading of the vision and approach to disabilities, presenting it in a social context. However, the heading “Functional Assessment System - Degree of Impairment” of this subchapter corresponds only partly to its content.

In the second subchapter, the historical perspective of the development of adapted skis is systematically traced. It is logically followed by the presentation of a variety of specialized equipment necessary for the practice of adapted snow sports, both competitive and recreational in the third subchapter. Undoubtedly an important factor for the development of the paraski is the adapted equipment and quite logically the author pays considerable attention to this.

The Competitions and the variety of disciplines are covered in depth in the fourth subchapter entitled "Adapted skis as a sport for excellence". The snow sports included in the competition program of the three largest international sports movements for people with different abilities, namely the Paralympic Movement, Special Olympics (SO) and Deaflympics, are considered. Paralympic skiing, as part of the program of the Winter Paralympic Games, is correctly described in great detail. The doctoral student demonstrates enviable knowledge in the field of the classification system, to which considerable attention has been paid. Here the author has not complied with my recommendation to edit the title of the subchapter. In two places in the text, SO is described as an elite sport or an elite sports movement. The Special Olympics movement aims to provide sports opportunities for as many athletes as possible. Participants in the World Games are selected on a lottery principles and not according to their sporting achievements. **Question- I would like the doctoral student to explain the reason for this notion.** The Special Olympics movement also demands that the participants with intellectual disabilities are called "athletes," but the doctoral student has only partially complied with this. The presentation of the third significant sports movement for people with disabilities - Deaflympics is fragmentary, despite its long history. The technical errors made in the first sentence of 1.4.3 have not been corrected. The current description of the other four organizations developing adapted skis shows that the author follows the trends in their development, but there is missing logical connection to describe their connection with the Paralympic skis.

In subchapter I.5. The management of the paraski in four countries - Canada, Finland, Israel and Australia is presented in detail. The studied international experience can definitely be related to the contributing elements of this dissertation. **Question - On what principle is based the choice of the described countries, giving the fact that you have carried out direct and indirect monitoring of Finland, Italy, Dubai, Israel and Bulgaria.**

In the last two parts, the doctoral student has studied and presented the role of infrastructure and human resources for the development of adapted skis. The analysis of the forms of organization of the infrastructure and the legislation, as

well as the requirements regarding the human resource can serve as a basis for deriving a number of summaries, evaluations and formation of new approaches for development of the adapted skis in Bulgaria. The chapter logically ends with a working hypothesis, which is edited and approaches the overall research direction of the dissertation.

The second chapter of the dissertation begins with the goal, which is well formulated. Adequate research methodology was used. The subject and the object are correctly defined. Recent terminology is used.

A sports-pedagogical experiment was described in detail, organized and conducted, through a survey, in-depth interview, field observation, expert evaluation, Single case study. The survey is based on a theoretical model. Mathematical and statistical methods have been correctly selected and applied. The description of the conducted pedagogical observation is impressive.

A total of 65 ski teachers, 2 ski school managers, 3 hotel managers, 8 volunteers (5 people with disabilities who use a wheelchair in their daily lives and 3 parents) were included in the study. The research was conducted in the period 2016-2019.

The organization of the study and all stages in it are comprehensively described. At the end of the chapter, the information about the number of people included in the survey and in-depth interview is repeated, which we attribute to a technical error.

In the analysis of the results presented in the third chapter we can note the following positive aspects, where some of them holding a contribution character:

1. The condition and opportunities for development of adapted skis according to the model are established: natural resources, ski areas, ski tourism, human factor in two directions: suppliers and users of the service, financing, interest in the product.
2. The factor structure of accessibility is derived and two main factors are distinguished: accessibility of the environment and accessibility of the equipment. On this base the three major ski centers in Bulgaria - Bansko, Borovets and Pamporovo are analyzed.
3. Related the fundamental principles in the theory of adapted physical activity, the results of field observations and case studies are described. Reactions, environmental influences and individual adaptations were assessed. Regarding the notions for success, the author uses generalizing conclusions without substantial argumentation.

4. An up-to-date model of organization and provision of winter camps on adapted skis at different skill levels and for different types of disabilities has been developed, which I can define of having the highest contribution character.

5. The attitudes of ski teachers towards working with people with disabilities were studied, which is the first of its kind in this target group. The results demonstrate the evolution of public attitudes, and the positive results are a prerequisite for creating an inclusive environment for people with disabilities.

The results of the statistical analysis are well illustrated. Table 25 is not analyzed in the text, it is without any contribution and easily could be dismissed. It is also not necessary to present the same results in a table and graphic such as Table 26 and Graph 49. Table 29 has no title.

The conclusions and recommendations defined at the end of the dissertation objectively reflect the research and analytical work performed by the doctoral student and correlate with the objectives. They are well formulated and give a finished look to the dissertation.

The critical remarks and recommendations which I made do not in any way detract from the final results achieved. With full awareness of how difficult it is to translate the specialized terminology in adapted and para sports, I make a final recommendation to Boyana Kotseva to be more responsible towards details, to use smart and carefully the terminology, because the words do matter.

Thesis summary, scientific contributions and publication activity

In structural and substantive terms, the Thesis summary meets the requirements of the Law (ЗЗЗЗЗЗЗЗ) and the Regulations for its implementation. It sufficiently reflects the structure, content and results related to the topic of the dissertation. The marked contributions are presented precisely.

With regard to the topic of the dissertation, the doctoral student has presented 3 publications in accordance with the individual plan and the minimum required points for obtaining scientific degrees of NSA "Vasil Levski". The scientific articles have been published in the scientific journal "Sport & Science" and in two different Congress Proceedings.

No forms of plagiarism or common publications are identified.

### **Personal impressions**

I know the doctoral student well, I am convinced of her qualification and professionalism and I can confidently say that this dissertation reflects the rich practical experience, knowledge and interests of the author in the field of adapted

snow sports. This is the first approach to the topic in Bulgaria and is the result of both the research and creative activity of the doctoral student, as well as the expertise of the scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Yankov.

## CONCLUSION

The presented dissertation is actual, meaningful and contains the necessary qualities. The idea is original, the tools for implementation are selected appropriately and final result could be applied in the practice. The dissertation meets all the conditions and requirements of the Law (ЗЗЗЗЗЗЗЗ) and the Regulations of NSA "Vassil Levski" for obtaining scientific degrees and holding academic positions.

In this regard, I give my **positive assessment** and propose to the Distinguished Members of the Scientific Jury to award **Boyana Konstantinova Kotseva** the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**" in the field of higher education 7. "Healthcare and Sports", professional field 7.6. Sports, doctoral program "Theory and methodology of sports science".

22.01.2021

Sofia

Reviewer:

(Assoc. prof. Stefka Djobova, PhD)