

ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS BY MS. GABRIELA GAGEA

Thesis submitted to: **NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS**

Bucharest, Romania, 2008

Thesis Advisor: **Prof. Dr. C. IOAN NEGULESCU**

Thesis Title: **A PREDICTIVE MODEL OF THE ROLE AND EVOLUTION OF RECREATIONAL SPORTS IN ROMANIA**

The doctoral thesis was worked out within the framework of the National Plan for Research, Development and Innovation, of the Human Resources Programme (increasing number of researchers in Romania) and of the IDEAS programme (scientific results at European level), CNCSIS Grant No. 283/2008-2010.*

The thesis comprises three parts, with a joint introductory chapter. Part I refers to the current stage of knowledge on recreational sports, the specialized literature including both agreements and differences of opinions on the matter. Of the two trends prevailing in Europe, one attempts to equalize and standardize the concept, the other one takes into account the national and regional features specific to each EU state.

The second part of the thesis describes a pilot-experiment that allowed for the checking of the working logistics and instruments as well as for the reaching of some preliminary results, the main conclusion indicating the interview as a research instrument to be preferred to the questionnaire based procedure for the field under investigation.

The third part of the thesis reaches, by means of an in-depth study, a synthetic view and interpretation of the findings – patterns and trends – related with the recreational sports in Romania and the EU.

The doctoral thesis ends with a chapter incorporating the final conclusions derived from both the theoretical research and the practical segment and comprising over 150 bibliographical references.

The legal framework in Romania allows and obliges organizers to observe the main purpose of sports, i.e. of sanogenesis, at the same time with the social attributes and the educational role of these activities.

The beneficial biological, mental and social effects of recreational sports, regardless of whether practiced individually, in groups or at national level, represent a postulate within this scientific research; they are considered to be self-evident and require no proof.

The relationship between sports and economics no longer represents a taboo subject and, in view of the multiple virtues of recreational sports, it tends to expand into the field of leisure sports as well. The range of goods and services offered in this sector is continuously growing; in civilized countries it is actually possible to speak of a leisure industry. The economic function of leisure proves to be ambivalent, according to R. Sue (1991), as it stimulates the production-consumption system in virtue of the supposed expenditure, but it can cause harm as well, if spare time is not spent appropriately.

* CNCSIS – National Council for University Scientific Research

The professional literature and official documents issued in developed European countries reveal various meanings for the phrase "recreational sport", some of which extremely rigorous and restrictive and others rather vague and confusing. The author considers, however, the most serious confusion to be that between the concept of "recreation", in terms of regenerating the occupational potential of "mature and active" persons (as defined by the National Institute of Statistics) and the notion of "leisure", understood as entertainment, fun or playing (with a particular reference to school breaks as perceived by pupils and parents).

The ideas most likely to be subject to a questionable approach refer to the practising of sports as spare time activities, disregarding the fact that, except for professional athletes, the high-level competitive sports, as well as all other forms of sport, are practised exclusively at leisure: e.g. sports for the disabled, therapeutic sports, extreme sports etc. Leisure time management is noted to significantly depend on factors such as the age of the practising individuals their social category, their educational, cultural and traditional backgrounds.

The author chooses, for similarity reasons, the activities of adults in civilized European countries, characterized by a medium educational level and pursuing professions resulting in a fairly regular living standard for the day-to-day patterns of theoretical reference. These are split, theoretically and proportionally, into: time assigned to professional activities, time dedicated to passive rest and so-called "leisure time" (free time). Individuals belonging to the above-mentioned category are shown to carry out amalgamated, yet distinguishable activities, referring to either necessary tasks (family utilities, socialising etc.), enjoyment (hobbies, habits, traditions etc.) and, last but not least, to wasting of time (with no further explanation).

Sport activities, such as recreational sports, high-level competitive sports, therapeutic, extreme or other forms of sports tend, therefore, to compete with or to be associated to hobbies, interests or cultural entertainment, to light physical activities (gardening, trips with cultural goals, outings etc.), practised individually, with other family members or within groups of social affinity. Wasting free time is pointed out to be the most inert form of those which can be harmful to the individual or society - such as vices or addictions, for instance (consumption of alcohol, drugs or hooligan type and violent behaviour – physiologically caused by or due to excessive energy and possibly connected with educational shortcomings or mental disorder).

The author of the thesis stresses upon the fact that recreational sports are herewith given a survey, being examined by rational means, alternative to some opinions without scientific support, encountered in literature. In a classical sense, the author agrees with those who define recreational sports as a bio-socio-cultural physical activity with multiple health-promoting benefits, representing a variety of socio-cultural leisure etc. In terms of logic, according to the Abelard-approach, recreational sports are being evaluated from the point of view of their causal determination, as processes and, above all, taking into account their effects.

Following to intensive documentation, after consultation with specialists and based on the studying of further official papers, it is concluded that the meaning of the phrase "recreational sports" can be summarised in terms of theoretical operators or as a common vocabulary concept, as representing activities carried out systematically, with, pleasure and awareness of the expected benefits:

- Regeneration of the work potential, in terms of restoring the work capacity, the metabolic balance, the creative efficiency and skills;
- Improvement, maintenance or enhancement of health, appearance, and gestures (look);
- Attainment of physical and psychological comfort, of pleasure in its broadest sense, of hobby or lifestyle.

The steps of attracting the active population to practising recreational sports and their tendencies may be varied and multiple, representing, however, under any circumstances, an issue of adapting to a certain social or national category.

In countries with an advanced economic and civic level, physical education in schools is limited to practical instruction for basic notions of sports, fair play, attitude and conduct in sports, discipline, hygiene, respect for one's peers and nature etc. The educating and developing of the

sport skills of children is carried out in these countries predominantly through school sport lessons, unlike the situation in our country and the curriculum of the sport lessons here.

At university level, sports are practised in a competitive manner, involving different universities in an emotional and participatory manner, emphasizing the belongingness to a certain institution. In other European countries, the specialized university teachers, although known as sports instructors, are highly respected and properly remunerated, quite often even better than the university academics. The remuneration criterion consists, of course, in the efficiency proven in engaging the students in university or recreational sports (practised in an organized way).

The *foresight* exercise excludes copying models, even if coming from advanced countries, its real basis consisting in the experience of others and one's own; it is versatile, stands for adaptability and even compromise.

Based upon *foresight* information and predictions, decision makers and strategists can work out plans and manage appropriate budgets without leaving the recreational sports in desolation or overgrown by the weeds of plain amusement, harmful yet profitable for those who exploit ignorance.

The European countries manage, by negotiation and mutual agreement, to promote joint programs of harmonizing education, health, environment protection, sports, etc., this including the recreational sports as well. The year 2008 marked the starting of national studies and pilot projects, with the possibility of practical implementation in 2011, respectively as of 2009, at the proposal of Germany, in the framework of some ample, joint programs. These actions are stipulated in the EU White Paper on Sport and are to be monitored and implemented by one of the specialized committees. All these measures together make up the "Pierre de Coubertin" action plan that will guide the activities of the European Commission regarding sports for the following years. In Romania there are hopes for the issuing of a law in the near future, to regulate such activities and support the decision makers and the non-governmental organizations in their endeavours to facilitate the practising of recreational sports by the population.

Foresight is an analyzing and forecasting instrument, representing, at the same time, a process consisting in collecting and processing the information necessary for a long-term planning. The political-strategic decisions are counting on *foresight*, due to the flexibility of this approach and its ability to provide alternatives, priorities and adaptable hierarchies. The studying of the specialized literature confirmed the author of the thesis the successful use of *foresight* in the European Union and, partially, in Romania. As for recreational sports, *foresight* is also taking into account the reactions and biological impact upon the economic, social and cultural living standard, as well as the round connection (multiple feedback) created between health, physical and psychological comfort and welfare on the one hand, and economic growth, the progress of society and its civilizing benefits on the other hand.

The offer currently available in Romania is relatively modest and does not solve the demand for mass sport and ludic activities adequately. This segment of activity devolves for the time being to small enterprisers, with only a short and medium term perspective and limited to a few geographical areas and the large cities.

Official forums, such as "The Romanian Federation SPORTS FOR ALL" have accountabilities regarding the organizing and facilitating of the practising of sports by all categories of persons, for the sake of health, education and recreation. The author considers the phrase "sports for all" to mean "sports for the many", since not everyone and or wants to practise sports for the above purposes. A part of the population, actually a very small percentage of it, of about 2-3% (in France about 7%) practises performance sports, while another part of the population, at the other extreme, practises adaptive sports. Most people are invited to practise what is called "recreational sports", voluntarily and in their spare time.

Some European countries identified specific solutions for the developing of recreational sports. In Hungary, for example, recreational sports are associated with competition performance sports practised in sports clubs belonging to schools and universities or in private ownership. The difference is made by the sportsperson badge, granted upon the basis of a standardized performance. Thus it is considered that persons practising sports based upon performance practise organized sport. The State has legal grounds to indirectly subsidize the recreational sports, which are practically considered as organized, by paying instructors, supporting competitions etc. In

Romania, competitions with stimulative prizes are yet sporadic, being based upon volunteering and with rather modest, private, sponsorships.

In England, as well as in all Commonwealth countries, especially in Australia, the first priority consisted in the creating of the appropriate environment and conditions, such as sports grounds, tracks for bikers or joggers, playgrounds etc., which ensured an efficient promoting of these sports. In other countries, such as Germany and Holland, the Government institutions, but especially the private ones, hire specialists and instructors who focus – irrespectively of the economic profile of the company – on the organizing of the practising of an attractive form of recreational sports, by trips, excursions, specialized mini-competitions, with the undissimulated purpose of increasing the professional efficiency.

In Austria recreational sports are practised under attractive slogans such as “Fit for Austria”, subconsciously appealing to patriotic feelings. The applying of certain means, such as the promoting of the traditional Chinese forms of Chi Gong, Tae Bo etc., which are not based on local traditions, comes, actually, quite close to a manoeuvre, but has, eventually, positive effects on the self-discipline of youth.

In Finland, the tradition of recreational sports is so strong, that the only issues which may arise are related to the possibilities of organizing some gigantic mass competitions, such as the famous cross-country ski races, involving the participation of over a hundred thousand of competitors of various ages.

The decision-makers and strategists have to take into consideration the wish to enhance work productivity and efficiency, but also their concern regarding the way in which youth manage their spare time – with potentially risky effects on the future of society.

The European Council has sensed the danger of wasting and especially of misusing spare time, being currently in the process of finding solutions for a suitable *foresight*, including the stimulating of the practising of recreational sports. The Council is already involved in the process of writing a bill of firm recommendation (similar in character with the European Charter of Sports) for the European countries to use sports in general, including recreational sports, in the fight against violence, drug and alcohol consumption etc. There is also a provision for community funds, in which Romania participates as well. In absence of viable projects, Romania does, however, not qualify, for the time being, for the use of the funds.

In comparison with the wide-spread appetite of Northern populations for mass competitions, the races organized by the RAF (Romanian Athletic Foundation) for children or seniors represent considerable challenges for volunteers (such as the Olympic winner Gabi Szabo) and those in charge with the attracting of sponsors).

In most European countries with an advanced civilization, the legislation in place and the international norms adopted by transnational organizations oblige all hotels and resort-type groups, including the health and spa resorts, to have facilities of practising recreational sports, these having to be distinct from the entertainment facilities. The important hotels view this obligation as a challenge, in many ways profitable, and organize recreational sports with instructors, free transportation, fitness rooms, aerobic, body building, etc.

The conclusions referring to the practical part of the research integrate the rational interpretations based upon statistic arguments by the binary processing of the data obtained from the interviewing of a rough sample of different ages, professions and social status.

It has to be pointed out that, by its dimensions and coverage (geographical areas, rural or urban residency, types of activity, professions etc.) this sample is not (officially) representative for Romania. The largest part of answers comes from persons with intellectual activities, office work, a generally sedentary lifestyle or with little physical effort.

Interviewed were 711 adult persons, statistically defined as active population; 83% gave some rather dryly admitted not to practise any recreational sports, while 17% said they practised recreational sports regularly or occasionally. The percentage for those not practising any recreational sports whatsoever is alarmingly high, even though, when continuing the interview, it became apparent that the benefits of recreational sport were well known. From reliable sources acquired during a visit in France it appears that the proportion of active adult persons from a given rural village that practise recreational sports (*loisir*) is, by sheer coincidence, equally high, but

reversed. It is worth mentioning that 83% of the inhabitants of a French village practise various recreational sports, participate without any hesitation in volunteering works to the benefit of their rural community and, by pursuing these activities, very likely manage to achieve a lifestyle of remarkable social cohesion.

A detailed processing of the valid data indicates that only 10% practise recreational sports systematically, this meaning a minimum rate of at least once every two weeks, while 4% practise some sport activity occasionally, for fun, generally of seasonal type, such as winter or summer sports, beach and water sports. For the sample under discussion, the holiday is considered cumulated free time, being exploited intensively.

A considerable number of interviewed persons, representing 79%, said they would have liked to practise recreational sports, but for various reasons did not. Another group, of young people, (surprisingly) acknowledge the benefits of recreational sports but prefer computers and generally activities that require low physical effort. From the multitude of reasons that impede the development of recreational sports two main causes strike out: the investments in facilities (F) and the rejection, by ignorance, of the beneficial effects of the systematical and systemic practising of recreational sports - which can be simply translated by educational deficiencies (E).

The findings show that the preferences of the interviewees cover especially ball games, including the classical sports and their "reduced" versions, such as indoor football, beach football, mini-football, the local, popular form of this game ("*miuta*"), as well as playing ball outdoor, on grass, in water and other holiday improvisations. Another preference, especially of those with a higher living standard, is fitness – a physical effort made with the goal of attaining a nice posture and appearance. The top of preference list also includes the walks through nature, "in the green" – forests, parks, hills and mountains. Easy climbing and hiking are practised mostly in summer, during vacation. The least favourite activities / pastimes of recreational sports are extreme sports (practised not as bravery, but rather as an eccentricity), sports practised by inertia after a period of performance activity (senior athletes, veterans), typical Romanian ethno-folk sports, such as horse back riding, target shooting, ad hoc party games organized with barbeques, etc. The latter activities seem to be gradually superseded by some commercial games, such as paintball or ATV runways.

It was ascertained that the number of persons not practising recreational sports was extremely high in all the age categories. Worth mentioning is also the fact that both the young and the old interviewees had the same attitude towards recreational sport, which is believed to reduce the reasons causing this to two hypothetical sources: education and practising facilities. This situation is likely to reflect the insufficient concern of the Romanian society for the promoting and the practising of recreational sports, in spite of the fact that these represent one of the most relevant indicators of the quality of life, as well as an effective instrument of influencing the living standard (*livability*).

The - probably the most important - conclusion of this practical-interpretative exercise refers to the identifying of the degree of mutual conditioning between the causality of education type and the causality of facilities type. The experiment revealed that an inferred share of 9 units can be attributed to education, with a share of 23 units allocable to facilities.

The percentage conversion of the above ratio indicates that the investments in education may be ascribed 28%, and the investments in facilities (sports grounds, tracks, sports halls, etc.) may be granted 72% of a reasonable total. This reasoning may be considered a scientific result based on objective data, representing a more solid ground than an opinion of some sort (irrespectively of its degree of authorization). As far as the way of making such investments, their succession or simultaneity is concerned, it is believed that the investment should be carried out simultaneously, in the above-mentioned ratios. The burden of implementing these findings, regarding the necessity of investments, devolves, anyway, upon the decision-makers, the author having no grounds to doubt their good intentions regarding the increasing of the quality of life in Romania or concerning the rate of integrating in the EU, as an expression of civilizing.

Summary of the Personal Contributions and Intellectual Property Rights

The taxonomies regarding recreational sports are variegated, sometimes contradictory or bewildering. The author dares to believe that the splitting of sports into three operational groups – performance sports, recreational sports and adaptive sports – represents a comprehensive classification. The category of performance sports would include, beside those which are already acknowledged at competitive level, the extreme sports, the (public) sensational sports, the eccentricities, etc. Adaptive sports, those practised by persons with disabilities, also include activities of sport-therapy, paralympic competitions etc. Recreational sports comprise spare/free time sports (since they are practised exclusively at leisure), including the sports for all (i.e. the sports for the many), outdoor sports, entertainment sports (since they obviously involve pleasure) etc. To the author's knowledge this kind of approach has never been adopted so far.

The thesis includes an operational definition of recreational sports, in which the triangular illustrative representation (radar diagrams) points to three categories of benefits: the restoring of the occupational potential, in the sense of recovering the working capacity, the metabolic balance, the creative efficiency and the skills, the improvement, maintaining or stimulating of one's health, appearance and gestures and the reaching of a physical and psychological comfort, of pleasure, in its widest sense, of hobby or of lifestyle. Such definition has not been found in the specialized literature to date. This definition and the associated representation vectorizes any type of recreational practise in the field of the three triangular components, conferring it a distinct, specific character.

The interpretation of the data, as synthesized in the above conclusions, is appreciated to be original. The relation established between the causality of education (28%) and that of facilities (72%), as identified by the author, indicating a mutual interdependence, of a vicious circle type, yet with beneficial effects, appears to be an original scientific conclusion, founded on appropriate statistic elements and superseding the level of an opinion (although it may coincide with an experimented point of view).