

The comparison of contemporary stay of swimming persons with physical impairment in Great Britain and Czech Republic

Karel Kovařovic, Gabriela Břečková

Abstract: *The aim of the contribution is to compare the present state of conditions and levels of swimming courses for people with physical impairment in Great Britain and the Czech Republic. This comparative study is held on the basis of historical evolution of both evaluated states.*

Furthermore, in accordance with the collected data the study evaluates the influence of the state institutions for swimming of physically challenged people, on the professional education of teachers (assistants) as well as on the legislative supports and state interventions for creating wheelchair access environment. The evaluation of the current state is an evaluation of applied methodology of swimming education and its focus on physical rehabilitation activities, of social, interest or performance kind. The table method is used for the mutual comparisons and assessment of the total number of the clubs and organizations dealing with this activity in listed European Union countries.

Keywords: *physical impairment, swimming, requirements, methods, comparison*

1 Historical conditions and formation of organized swimming for physically challenged people in Great Britain and the Czech Republic

Swimming for physically challenged people as an organized and managed physical activity in both countries evolved in completely different social conditions. Nevertheless, the primary goals of physical exercises in water and swimming were across those differences identical. There was provided physiotherapy care in specialized institutions and facilities. Later on there was an element of socialization, of interest, of recreation and of body building assigned to those activities. By gradual expansion

of the original goals there were continuing necessary changes in the conditions for organizing the activities. Initially, this issue was dealt mainly in medical and physiotherapy departments, where the whole process was usually terminated by achievement the stabilized state of health of the individual. With the gradual expansion of physical activities of physically challenged people, there was also a great increase of the impact of social organizations that provide the activities for the whole population, or organizations that were created directly in order to provide the appropriate conditions for people with special needs. With the increasing influence of central authorities, there are created new laws and rules for the organizations in different areas of the society. New conditions have brought following consequences: building standards, creation of transportation systems, educational programs for professional (special) educators, etc. The state gradually takes over the dominant role in the creation of the limiting conditions. With respect to the specific conditions and historical contexts, the aim of our text is to monitor and assess the current situation in terms of ensuring the full integration of people with physical impairment to selected swimming program in selected states, all members of the European Union.

2 Historical development in the UK

The first activity, which led to the organization of people with physical impairment, can be considered the establishment of The British Polio Fellowship. This organization was founded together by Patricia Carey and Frederic Moreno in 1938. This organization was focused on improving the overall living conditions of people diagnosed with Poliomyelitis. In 1944 under instruction from the British government there was established a special hospital for patients with spinal disabilities – The Stoke Mandeville Hospital. In connection with the Olympic Games in London in 1948 there were organized the Stoke Mandeville Games for the patients of this hospital. Swimming was included among the contests as one of the individual disciplines. Another major step was the activity of swimming club London Southgate Seals Swimming Club, which invited to the swimming races six physically challenged girls from Halliwick School for Girls Crippled, in 1949. Participation of girls in swimming races initiated the need for systematic training and long-term approach to the swimming education for people with physical impairment. The first comprehensive concept for Halliwick School was developed by hydromechanics James McMillan. His ten-point program became the basis for Halliwick method of swimming education of people with physical impairment, which has been applied in the United Kingdom till these days. Development of basic methodology has enabled to found the first swimming club in 1951, bringing together physical challenged swimmers who called themselves Halliwick Penguins Swimming Club. In 1952, there occurred a need for establishing

a central authority that would deal with the specific activities. The Halliwick Association of Swimming Therapy was founded. The formation of this organization brought great development of swimming of people with physical impairment. They are mostly organized in swimming clubs, where the Halliwick method is being applied. The increasing number of swimming clubs for people with physical impairment led to the gradual establishment of national and international organizations, such as BSAD (British Swimming Association for Challenged, 1960), ISOD (The International Sports Organisation for Challenged, 1964), or NASCH (National Association of Swimming Clubs for the Handicapped, 1965).

3 Historical development in the Czech Republic

The first specific organization that has been systematically dealing with people with physical disability was The Institute and School of Prague called “Jedličkův ústav”, founded in 1913. As a part of rehabilitation procedures there were also included different types of hydrotherapy. In 1947 the Rehabilitation Institute in Kladruby-Vlašim started to serve a similar purpose. At this institution in 1948 the first Kladruby games focusing on sport were organised there, and swimming was also included. Another qualitative shift of interest in activities for people with disabilities was the foundation of the Central Unity for disabled in 1949. In the beginning of the 50th there was created the State Commission for the management of physical education and sports of athletes with special needs, which was transformed into the organizational structures of the Central CSTV, such as section for athletes with special needs in 1961. In 1970 the independent Union of Physical and Visually Impaired Athletes was founded, it allowed the development of foreign contacts, the entry of different teaching and training methods and confrontation of sport performance. An important step was also enactment of swimming lessons at primary schools, which, however, into the curriculum of special schools for the disabled came only as an alternative physical activity. Through further transformation processes inside CSTV in 1988 The Union of Disabled Athletes was created from which the independent Union of Physical Disabled People was allocated in 1990. All these organizations operated primarily in the swimming performance. The area of swimming education for people with physical disability was insufficient, which caused increased physical and social isolation of disabled people until the time of the social changes. The first organization that had the primary aim of integration of people with physical disability was The Wheelchair Association in 1990. Another major benefit of swimming education for people with physical disability had the presentation of Halliwick Method by Rajko Vutem from Ljubljana at the University of Palacky in Olomouc. The subsequent study stay of Doc. Mgr. Blahutková Ph.D. in Slovenia helped significantly to the extension

of this method in the Czech Republic. In 1995 the project KONTAKT started, with its main aim to integrate people after the injury or illness with the loss of mobility into the society. Based on this project there was created the independent civic association Kontakt bB in 1999.

It can be said that until 1990 institutional and family care dominated in the area of swimming and organizing physical activities in water. Until that period integration of disabled people was not considered as a social problem. After the social changes the problem of integration, socialization and equal employment opportunities for disabled people, including the new grant system of funding those activities became the priority of social organizations. Finally, there have been changes in the educational system, including the emergence of new curricula at faculties of pedagogy (Physical education and craft for people with disability, Applied Physical Education, Special Education, etc.)

4 The current state of swimming program for people with physical disabilities in the UK

The main organizations providing these activities in the UK are the Association of Halliwick Method. Small specialized clubs, associations and local organizations working in the administrative units, cities, or municipalities form the executive branch for working with people with physical disability. Halliwick Association creates a network of 16 regional organizations marked AST (Association of Swimming Therapy). The so-called ASTRA is an organizational unit of a particular region, and it manages the work of all clubs and organizations with a swimming program for people with physical disability. In addition to this network there exists many clubs working with people with physical disability on the base of voluntary association with support of the city, village or even swimming institutions in the UK. To create the basic idea of the mass character of the involvement of people with physical disability into this program and into voluntary associations the authors of the article present a summary of organizations registered in ASTRA in 2011:

	Number of registered	Number of volunteers	Number of pools used
ASTra 1	295	12	12
ASTra 2	108	7	7
ASTra 3	31	2	2
ASTra 4	124	6	6
ASTra 5	186	11	12
ASTra 6	54	4	4
ASTra 7	11	1	1
ASTra 8	87	5	5
ASTra 9	62	3	3
ASTra 10	100	4	4
ASTra 11	71	3	3
ASTra 12	149	7	7
ASTra 13	19	1	1
ASTra 14	inactive		
ASTra 15	249	13	13
ASTra 16	inactive		
IN SUM	1546	79	80

Every club function is performed voluntarily and without pay. The same organizational structure appears in every club:

- President (Chairman of the club)
- Club Secretary
- Social worker
- Web site administrator and administrator
- Swimming instructor
- Teacher – Certified expert for Haliwick method
- Physiotherapist
- A group of volunteers to work with disabled
- Treasurer

The dominant methodology applied in the teaching of swimming of people with physical disability is Halliwick method also called The Ten Point Programme. This method is for the expert in terms of swimming nonspecific and can be used for swimming lessons with healthy people with anxiety states, for seniors, for patients in rehabilitation and swimming lessons for pre-school children. The main characteristics of this teaching method are the principles of “one to one” and “face to face”. In each successive step the dominant element is safety of a client and positive learning atmosphere. Other specific methods of teaching swimming to people with disability are not used in Britain. Legislative support for these activities for the construction

and operation of swimming institutions is a “barrier-free law of recreational buildings.” To evaluate the usability of these institutions the following criteria are defined:

1. Availability of equipment
2. Barrier free parking
3. Freeway – free route from entrance to the building up to join the pool
4. Adapted changing rooms or cabins
5. Adapted sanitary facilities (toilets, showers)
6. Non-slip surfaces in the pool hall
7. Solution entrance and coming-out to the pool
8. Safety features at the pool (handles, a dedicated sector, walking floor, etc.)
9. Trained staff
10. Dedicated time for the people with special needs
11. Water temperature
12. Availability of swimming aids
13. Price reduction
14. Availability of pre-medical and medical care, including technical equipment

The list of monitored criteria fulfil fully the term “barrier-free system” thus safe and seamless client journey from home, until to a pool and other support for this activity. The most deficiencies occur in items 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11.

5 The current state of swimming for people with physical disabilities in the Czech Republic

Swimming for people with physical disability is organised by the Union of Physically Disabled in the Czech Republic. The Charles University of Prague; The Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, The Masaryk University of Brno; The Faculty of Sport Studies, The Centre of Life Education of Brno and The Palacky University of Olomouc; The Faculty of Pedagogy are participating in the preparation of university-educated professionals in this specific area. Although the educational system in the Czech Republic educates plenty of experts to ensure all the needs of people with special needs, their representation in public sector management (Government Legislative Council, Ministry of Health, Labour, and Ministry of Education) is minimal. The consequence of this situation leads to partial and often different solutions in different state regions in individual swimming institutions. The organisation of all activities for people with physical disability is provided by the Union of Physically Disabled in the Czech Republic; managed by the Administrative and Supervisory Board. These managing bodies of the Union have in their competence lower organizational units at regional districts, cities, and municipalities. In 2011 there were 456 organizational

units with approximately 45,000 members. 33 organizational units have their own swimming program. The list can be found at www.svaztp.cz. Physical activity, including swimming of associated people is only supported and organisationally ensured. The executive national organization is Kontakt bB, managed by the administrative and supervisory board, administrative leadership; in control there also acts a supervisor and a professional medical section. Kontakt bB operates in many locations with their own professional ensuring. Its clubs have the same structure containing the centre manager and his deputy, a coordinator and a head of swimming lessons. Each centre also includes a group of volunteers for contact with people with disability. Personnel of clubs perform their duties without pay. Significant is also the co-operation with the civic association with rehabilitation institutes, especially in Kladruby. This cooperation helps to affect difficult mental states of clients after loss of mobility, often culminating in the active phase of their life, through swimming activities. In the Czech Republic there are also other special interest organizations that provide access to swimming activities for people with limited physical ability, but their activities do not create a separate organizational structure. Some of these organizations cooperate with Kontakt bB, especially in the area of teaching methodology. To get a framework overview of the involved people and organizations the following data can be presented:

	Number of registered	Number of people in the team	Number of equipment used/ weekly
Kontakt bB Praha	121	25	1/5×
Kontakt bB Brno	89	44	2/2×, 3×
Kontakt bB Karlovy Vary	55	31	2/3×, 1×
Kontakt bB Č. Budějovice	33	17	2/3×, 1×
RÚ Kladruby	cooperating organization in the area of methodology		
O. s. OKNA J. Hradec	27	17	1/3×
SK Vodomílek Jihlava	26	19	2/1×, 2×
Cesta životem K. Hora	16	9	1/2×
O. s. DRÁK Liberec	18	21	1/1×
Plaváček Děčín	cooperating organization		
TOTAL	385	184	12

Swimming for people with physical disability is ensured directly by swimming clubs and by other sports clubs, as Dukla Prague – Division of People with Disabilities, or the Association of disabled in the Czech Republic – association of Strakonice; in addition to the above mentioned data.

In the Czech Republic there are applied mainly two methods of teaching swimming for people with limited physical ability. In the Czech Republic there is also

used ten-point Halliwick method program. Its application is mainly concentrated in rehabilitative care and experiential swimming in rehabilitation institutions. Experiential swimming with application of this methodology is organized for example in the Social Care Institute for children with physical disability in Brno-Kociánka. The professional supervisor of this facility and for the whole Czech Republic is Doc. Mgr. Marie Blahutková Ph.D. Furthermore there is used a methodology that was created by representatives of the Kontakt bB. The basic principle of this method is access to the people with limited physical ability, concerning even psychosocial, experiential and health preventive (recreational) areas. It is primarily focused on resocialization of people with physical disability. Sports (performance) swimming creates only a kind of superstructure of this process. Like Halliwick method this teaching is divided into two successive steps in the learning stages, preliminary and basic. The content of these stages is comparable with the general phasing of swimming instruction with respect to the specific conditions of physical impairment. The final objective of preparatory phase is to stabilize the body of a swimmer with limited physical ability on the surface without floating aids. In the basic stage, there are rehearsed simple loco motor movements, especially in the position on back. Particular attention is devoted to swimming breathing and rhythm of exhale into the water. Other gradual steps are sensorimotor exercise, practising changes of positions and specific stroke movements – sculling. In the professional press this methodology is called in English Aqua (E)Motion Therapy.

Barrier-free access to buildings is legislatively supported by a number of sub-decrees and government regulations. The major organization working in this area is Czech Chamber of Architects, engineers and technicians involved in constructions. This organization is the creator of mandatory standards and professional guarantor for barrier-free program. Unfortunately professionally treated is only the part of building. Other elements of barrier-free access are fully in responsibility of the regional state administration bodies. Therefore to create a complete barrier-free system (freeway) is often unsolvable problem. Another problem is represented by private investors or operators of swimming institutions. Even minor modifications, feasible for maintenance or reconstruction increase the required amount of funds. Without the financial participation of the state there are not implemented many of the necessary adjustments. A positive element is implementing the issues of people with special needs in the educational program of Water Rescue Service, responsible for training lifeguards in every institution in the country.

6 Conclusion

The comparative study is focused on evaluating the basic organizational structures that are creating specific conditions for swimming of people with physical disability in the two states of the European Union. Also the methods of teaching swimming and ways of ensuring swimming for enjoyment for people with limited physical ability are being assessed. Part of the text is an evaluation of legislative support for barrier-free programs and social conditions ensuring wide utilization of this activity, which brings significant health and integrative effects.

Karel Kovařovic, Gabriela Břečková
Faculty of Physical Education and Sport
Department of Swimming
Charles University of Prague
Czech Republic
e-mail: kovarovic@ftvs.cuni.cz