

SPORT OF THE ELDERLY

Walter Tokarski

German Sport University Cologne, Germany

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Abstract:

The elderly have become one of the most important target groups in the world of sports. Nevertheless, the increase of the sport involvement of the elderly is far less important than estimated. In later life the elderly get less and less interested in physical exercising and sport, across the life course being active in sport decreases. Being happy without sports, having other hobbies and having no time rank highest on the list of reasons for not being involved in sports. But without doubt such physical exercises and sport activities have particularly positive influence on improving the quality of life, on health, on life expectancy, on mental stability and on self-confidence. The knowledge regarding the value of physical exercise and sport in later life is quite impressive. Today there are no limits whatsoever for sport activities so there is a multitude of different sports to choose from. New types of sport activities for the elderly should be developed especially for beginners. For the future new designed programs, better and target-orientated information and better training of the instructors are demanded.

Key words: decrease of interest, positive influence, awareness, activity types

ALTERSSPORT

Zusammenfassung:

In der Welt des Sports sind die älteren Menschen eine der wichtigsten Zielgruppen geworden. Trotzdem ist die steigende Anzahl derjenigen, die sich sportlich betätigen, weit weniger wichtig als geschätzt. Später im Leben ist man immer weniger daran interessiert, sich körperlich zu bewegen oder Sport zu treiben, d.h. im Laufe des Lebens nimmt die sportliche Betätigung ab. Zufriedensein ohne Sport, andere Hobbys haben oder keine Zeit haben sind die meist genannten Gründe, weshalb man sich nicht sportlich betätigt. Das Sporttreiben hat aber zweifellos einen sehr positiven Einfluss auf die Verbesserung der Lebensqualität, auf die Gesundheit, die Lebenserwartungen, die Verstandskraft und auf das Selbstvertrauen. Die Kenntnis darüber, wie wertvoll es ist, im fortgeschrittenen Alter sich körperlich zu bewegen und Sport zu treiben, ist ziemlich erstaunlich. Heute sind der sportlichen Betätigung überhaupt keine Grenzen gesetzt und demzufolge hat man eine große Auswahl an verschiedenen Sportarten. Neue Inhalte und Formen der sportlichen Betätigung für ältere Menschen sollten gestaltet werden, insbesondere für die bisherigen Nichtsportler. In der Zukunft sind neue Programme, bessere und gezielte Informationen sowie bessere Ausbildung der Trainer gefragt.

Schlüsselwörter: Interesselosigkeit, positiver Einfluss, Bewusstsein, Typen von Aktivitäten

Sport of the elderly – some basic aspects of the topic

It is a well-known fact today that in industrial societies the elderly represent a major target group in the world of sport even though they are not the principal group of participants: they essentially

contribute to carrying on the dynamic developments realized in the sector of recreational and health sport. Today, life-long physical activity no longer remains a slogan, it has become a reality to a certain degree although not every single person is already involved, and also some not yet to the

extent scientists and politicians would prefer. New life and ageing styles are being experienced and new conceptual models of ageing have developed and continue to develop, expectations of the elderly as to their life-style, their environment, society and also as to the service providers in the field of physical exercise and sport have considerably changed in recent years which, in the first place, is due to advances in health, prolonged life expectancy, increased activity and higher incomes.

When discussing the issue sport of the elderly today, the following factors have to be considered:

- a) It is essential to address the fact that changes in the conceptual model of ageing have led to the fact that ageing and later life have adopted a completely new image.
- b) The daily routine, leisure and sport activities of elderly persons have to be included when we analyze sport of the elderly and if "life-long learning" should be understood as "life-long physical and mental exercising".
- c) Encouragement and any impeding factors preventing the elderly population from doing sports have to be addressed.
- d) The issue should be addressed in a way and by means to promote the ideal of continued physical exercise involvement through later life.

This paper is deliberately entitled "Sport of the Elderly" in contrast to the more often used "standard" term "sport for the elderly" for the following reasons: sport of the elderly is to be understood as an open definition which means that the older adults themselves decide whether to be in favour or against accepting pre-set activities of whoever provides a service or, on the other hand, whether they prefer to organize their own activities. The term "sport for the elderly", however, has a different perspective: it implies that service providers and suppliers may take or have to take actions to involve the elderly, which as a further consequence implies a certain amount of responsibility towards this age group. Advanced industrial societies already have successfully outgrown this phase (Schmidt, Schoettler, & Tokarski 1996).

Outgrowing the negative image – ageing as a process

In today's society, the image of the older person is often depicted as an inevitable onset of deficiencies: we associate loss and renunciation, dependence, physical frailty and care, altogether turning life into a burden. Based on this negative

image, demands consequently arise there to search out ways to impede or at least postpone the deficits and losses. And in this context, sport is regarded as being one of the most adequate measures. Correspondingly, sport programmes for the elderly are offered according to the principle "to escape ageing". This deficit perspective is changing more and more. Today, ageing is understood as a dynamic process, respectively, a certain span in the continuum of birth, life and death. This interpretation is based on the fact that every stage of life allows individual development and that later life represents a period with its own specific orientations and values. Consequently, we should not deal with the state of later life from the aspect of its potential deficits, but we should focus on the opportunities and activity options we encounter in later life which are the basis for a life-long learning development. In gerontology and geriatrics this process is also called the concept of "successful ageing" and involves the same: it means to achieve a certain state of balance between needs of an individual and the demands represented by the objectively and subjectively experienced living conditions (Schmitz-Scherzer & Tokarski, 1988), that is, to adapt to the given facts and to exploit one's potentials for active living and personal development.

In the years to come, the number of elderly persons in the European population will significantly increase (Tokarski, 1993). In 2030 more than 20% of the European population will be older than 60 and 5% will be older than 80 years of age. As a consequence, it is estimated that compared with today, a considerably higher percentage of elderly persons will participate in physical activities and sport as the future generation of the elderly is more strongly characterized by the dynamic development of leisure, physical fitness and health sports of the past 25 years than former generations. Due to better physical fitness, improved medical care and higher incomes, a considerable part of the elderly population will pursue an independent life. Furthermore, a structural and social change has led to the fact, that many of the elderly of today have completely different expectations and demands regarding their future life in society than former generations had. New-life and ageing styles have developed and continue to develop and are closely connected with a plurality and variability of ageing concepts, a fact, that has to be considered when offering programmes and services for older adults.

Sport activities of the elderly – sport involvement through the course of life

What are the life-styles and daily routines of the elderly like today? What kind of role do physical activities and sports play?

Studies have shown an indisputable trend towards a “new independence” of the elderly in contrast to former generations which is connected to specific terms, phrases and concepts as e.g. “to do whatever I like”, “relaxation”, “enjoyment”, “pleasure” and “having fun” which are clearly translated into everyday routines (Tokarski, 1989; Opaschowski, 1998). While mornings and lunchtime are primarily filled with activities to meet physiological needs, e.g. housework, cooking, gardening and “important things to do”, for many of the elderly the afternoons and evening hours are clearly leisure-dominated. Sports activities are planned for mornings, as well as for afternoons, and watching television already starts in the morning or in the early afternoon. Thus, there are a lot of activities competing with physical exercises and as a consequence, the increase in the sport involvement of the elderly is by far less important than is estimated and also less than the media sometimes claim it to be. There is more discussion about the sports activities of the elder generation than reality actually indicates. In Germany, for more than ten years the figure has been located somewhere between 10 and 13%. In conclusion, physical exercises and sport are not among the favourite and regularly or frequently performed activities of the elderly and it has to be pointed out, that this also applies to other European countries. There are many reasons which impede elderly persons from regular physical exercise which clearly underlines the fact, that sport is competing with other potential activities (Rott, 1996).

Statements like “experiencing personal well-being without sport”, “having other hobbies”, “having no time for sports activities” rank highest on the list of reasons for **not** being involved in sports activities, and only after that, the already well-known reasons originally related to sports can be mentioned. It is an interesting fact, however, that many older persons would start a physical exercise program if their physician recommended it. It has to be assumed that a significant group of the elderly is not informed on the positive effects of physical exercises as could be gathered after asking for specific expectations: non-participants have significantly lower expectations than persons involved in sports activities.

Without doubt, physical exercise and sport have a particularly positive influence on improving the quality of life of older persons and this even applies if the activities are started at an advanced age. The level of knowledge regarding the value of physical exercise and sport is quite impressive:

- Regular physical exercise leads to better health and increases well-being and happiness in later life.
- Physical exercise and sport increase life expectancy.
- Physical exercises and sport improve cardiovascular functions, prevent postural and muscular abnormalities and related diseases and preserve mental stability.
- Physical exercise and sports contribute to many functions which are essential for life and daily routine, e.g. fostering social interaction and social relationships.
- Physical exercise and sports help to organize the daily life and to increase self-confidence.
- And last but not least, physical exercise and sports are effective instruments for inter-generational communication.

Compared to individuals of the same age cohort, older persons engaged in sport activities are convinced that they are in a better health condition, they even think that the more sports they do, the healthier they are. This fact is most obvious at the age of the 70-year-olds plus. Appropriately, the physically active elderly assess their physical fitness to be superior, too (Rott, 1996). Nevertheless, despite all the well-known positive effects, it can be noticed that the group of elderly obviously is under-represented in the field of sport and that with an advanced age an increasing loss of activity is observed. In later life, the elderly are less and less interested in physical exercises and, consequently, their sport participation rate is decreasing.

However, there is an indisputable information gap in society as well as in sport science regarding the issue, as to which extent sport involvement changes across the course of life until later life and how sports activities are replaced which had been done during certain stages in life. Though, a number of international studies prove that:

- with advancing years, the probability of becoming involved in new sports is decreasing;
- when involved in new sports, team sports are replaced by individual sports;
- in comparison to males, females are more often impeded from physical exercises by certain circumstances and events in life and, taking into consideration married couples, even after 21

years of marriage or longer husbands still participate in active exercise (Tokarski, 1997).

More future studies within this context would be welcome.

Supporting and restricting factors in the field of sport of the elderly

Today, there are no limits whatsoever for sports activities and physical exercises in later life. The deciding factors are only being interested in physical activities or not, feeling physically fit and determined enough to follow a training programme and to find the appropriate programme. Besides sports associations and clubs, there are also many other institutions which offer adequate programmes (Allmer, Tokarski, & Walschek, 2001).

According to today's findings in gerontology and geriatrics, as well as in sport science there is no point in listing and implementing the appropriate low input and low performance sport programmes for the older generation. It is well-known, that weight training, as well as new sports find favour with the elderly and that they can be done without any negative effects just like in one's younger years. Being interested in sports increasingly becomes one of the deciding factors. Hence, in most cases older persons with an age-span of 20 to 30 years can be easily integrated into one single senior citizens sports group. There are, however, certain sensitive areas to be observed which demand a more homogenous age or gender cohort, as well as the specific circumstances of life should be taken into consideration.

There is a multitude of different sports and physical exercises to choose from. Sports associations, clubs and sports federations frequently design their sport programmes as a further stage of "traditional" sports and sometimes develop specific age-adapted competition systems, whereas service providers from outside the sports world increasingly offer new forms of exercise. However, these service providers still are rather few, which leaves a lot of room for new developments. Moreover, it has to be considered whether sport of the elderly is, in fact, to be understood as a further development of different sports, possibly even with some modifications, or whether there is a demand for a new type of sport for this age group, combining useful and essential activity elements from different sports into a new form. Furthermore, the issue of merging external contents together with sports into an attractive and meaningful activity should also be investigated.

One of the principal future issues will be to analyse the work very carefully which has already been achieved and to define a new approach towards more efficient work, even how to expand it and how possibly to set it up on a new basis. On account of the studies at hand, there is a broad variety of the self-imposed objectives of the service providers and health and health promotion, as well as the social aspects which play major roles in this context. Apart from that, sports associations and clubs consider the maintenance of the present and the acquisition of new members as equally important objectives. More differentiated target definitions regarding the varying target groups of older persons are seldom to be found. Correspondingly, the advertising leaflets and news sheets in most of the cases provide only general information. Vague or roughly listed terms and definitions often lead to the fact, that the elder generation only rarely feels the addressee of these advertising messages and hence, these messages do not cause them to be identified with their contents. Furthermore, it can be stated that most of the programmes are designed for the "young" old and, hence, mobile among the elderly, whereas the "old" old are left out.

Very important in this context is an adequate training of the instructors and it has to be taken into account that also persons from other circles could work within this field. Additionally, it should be considered to what extent the younger elderly can actively be involved in training their peers: according to a German study, for example, it is the younger elderly that are the active and initiative-taking members, whereas the older ones are the supporting group members (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Senioren-Organisationen, 1997:9). Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that there are frequent complaints about a non-existent or inappropriate training of the instructors and a lack of willingness to follow the training courses, a phenomenon which is not only observed in the segment of sport of the elderly, but also elsewhere, which means that there is a general demand for new incentives in this sector.

In the field of sport of the elderly, co-operation and networks gain more and more importance, even if they are not too common yet. There is a wide range of possible partnerships, though, sports associations and clubs are reluctant to accept welfare institutions, fitness studios, educational institutions, business companies and religious groups as their partners.

What has to be improved – demands for the future

Some demands for improvement have already been mentioned. However, four specific aspects have to be emphasized for the development and implementation of new programmes for the sport of the elderly.

- Creating more programmes specifically designed to meet the needs of today's senior citizens, possibly even a new form and type of sport of the elderly which combines the important exercise elements of different sports.
- Providing more and well-targeted information on the proved benefits of physical exercise and sports; in this context also new ways of communication in co-operation with scientists,

physicians and health insurance companies should be considered.

- Raising of the awareness that physical exercise and sports are important elements complementing other activities, together aimed at an active and satisfactory life-style in later life.
- Re-orienting the training of instructors and a better inclusion of volunteers prepared to accept mentoring and training functions.

In conclusion, the topic of sport of the elderly represents an essential aspect of the future of sport as such. Consequently, this sector can prove the specific value of sport within a human's life comprised of an improved quality of life in later years, health, expectation of a longer life, happiness and active living. And, who wouldn't like to have all these qualities in his or her later life?

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Correspondence to:
 Prof. Walter Tokarski, PhD
 Deutsche Sporthochschule Koeln
 Carl-Diem-Weg 6
 D-50927 Koeln, Germany
 Phone: + 49 221 4982 2000
 Fax: + 49 221 4982 8500
 E-mail: tokarski@dshs-koeln.de

SPORT STARIJIH OSOBA

Sažetak

Dobro je poznata činjenica da su u industrijskim društvima starije osobe glavna ciljna skupina u svijetu sporta: oni znatno pridonose dinamičnom razvoju rekreacijskog sporta i zdravstvenih sportskih programa. Danas sintagma "cjeloživotna fizička aktivnost" više nije prazna fraza; postala je prilično zamjetljivom realnošću, premda nije baš svaka osoba uključena u aktivnosti niti su svi uključeni onim intenzitetom koji preporučuju znanstvenici i političari. Razvili su se novi životni stilovi i stilovi starenja – očekivanja starijih osoba, vezana za životni stil, odnos okoline, društva, a onda i očekivanja od pružatelja usluga vježbanja i sporta znatno su se promijenila posljednjih godina poglavito zahvaljujući napretku medicine, produljenju očekivanog trajanja života, povećanoj aktivnosti i višim prihodima.

Ipak, uključenost starijih osoba u sportske aktivnosti ipak nije onolika koliko se procjenjuje. Naime, u zreloj dobi interes za tjelesnu aktivnost i sport rapidno slabi s godinama. Odgovori poput "Sasvim sam sretan bez sporta", "Imam druge hobije" i "Nemam vremena" najčešći su razlozi koji se navode protiv uključivanja u sportske aktivnosti.

Suvremeno društvo izgradilo je negativnu sliku starije osobe; to je kao skup sve većeg broja neizbježnih nedostataka - sa starošću se povezuju gubici i odbacivanje, ovisnost o tuđoj pomoći, fizička krhkost i potreba za njegom, što sve može postati težak teret. Iz te negativne predodžbe javlja se potreba da se nađu putovi za sprečavanje ili barem odgodu negativnih popratnih pojava starenja. U tome se sport prirodno nameće kao najprimjerenije sredstvo. Sukladno tome, sportski programi za starije nude se pod sloganom "izbjeći starenje". Na sreću, danas se starenje sve više shvaća kao proces, kao određeni dio u neprekinutom protoku vremena rođenja, života i smrti. Ta interpretacija starenja oslanja se na činjenicu da svako

životno razdoblje dopušta individualni razvoj te da je svako iduće razdoblje posebno po sebi svojstvenim orijentacijama i vrijednostima. Stoga se uvijek valja koncentrirati na mogućnosti, a ne na teškoće i nedostatke, jer nas to podržava u neprekidnom rastu čitava života. Pojam "uspješnog starenja", kako se taj proces još naziva u gerontologiji i gerijatriji, znači isto: nastojanje da se pronađe određena ravnoteža između individualnih potreba i želja, s jedne strane, i objektivnih i subjektivnih životnih uvjeta s druge, tj. čovjek se mora nastojati prilagoditi činjenicama i iz njih izvući najviše i najbolje što može za aktivno življenje i osobni rast.

Bez sumnje, tjelesno vježbanje i sportske aktivnosti pozitivno utječu na kvalitetu života, zdravlje, očekivano trajanje života, mentalnu stabilnost i samopouzdanje. Spoznaje o vrijednosti tjelesne aktivnosti i sporta za kasniji život vrlo su raširene. Danas nema ograničenja u vrstama tjelesnih aktivnosti, tako da svatko može pronaći za sebe pogodnu aktivnost iz mnoštva raznih sportova i sportskih programa.

Nažalost, postoji neslaganje u društvu i među kineziolozima u svezi s pitanjem o tome kolika je angažiranost i u kojim sportskim aktivnostima preporučljiva te kako se ona treba mijenjati s godinama života. Mnoštvo međunarodnih istraživanja utvrdilo je da:

- vjerojatnost za uključivanje u nove sportove znatno se smanjuje s prolaskom godina;
- prigodom uključivanja u nove sportove, timske sportove zamjenjuju individualni sportovi;
- razne životne okolnosti sprečavaju žene da se bave tjelesnom aktivnošću češće nego muškarce (primjerice, promatramo li bračne parove, vidimo da su i nakon 21 ili više godina braka, muševci još uvijek sportski aktivni).

U budućnosti bi trebalo razviti nove oblike sportskih aktivnosti za starije ljude, naročito početnike. Štoviše, potrebni su novi programi, bolje i ciljano informiranje te kvalitetnije osposobljavanje voditelja tjelesnih aktivnosti.