

**Original scientific paper**

## **STUDENT PERCEPTION OF ROLE OF SPORT AT UNIVERSITY**

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**Abstract:** The concept of university sports in Serbia is still dominantly based on occasional sports manifestations (competitions) for students. Mostly in the shape of single *ad-hoc* tournaments in different areas of sport or as competitions of student athletes within the University sports association. The current position of a majority of student population in terms of university sports in Serbia can be characterized as passive (spectators), while direct participants, who are recruited from the field of active competitive sports, have this only as an “additional” obligation within the sport they already practice in “their” sport clubs. Therefore, students’ perception of the role of sports/physical activity at university represents a very important determinant for creating adequate (new) program contents, concepts and for the implementation of physical education in higher education institutions in Serbia. The goal of this research, which is realised as an empirical non-experimental study, is to identify the attitude and opinion of students about the role of sport and organized physical exercising at university. The sample involved 227 students at the University of Novi Sad and Educons University from Sremska Kamenica. Survey was used as the basic research technique, and the instrument was constructed as a questionnaire whose basic semantic structure was based on similar instruments used in a few earlier studies. The results showed that the currently trend indicates a drop in regular practice of sport after enrolment in faculty, but youth positively perceive the role of sports at higher education institutions, clearly recognizing its importance in social interaction. Therefore, pedagogical implications of this research can certainly dominantly relate to management structures of higher education institutions in shape of a clear message about the necessity to introduce more intense education of all education

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stakeholders about the values and importance of physical activity (physical exercising) of youth. In that context, they also encourage changes in overall education policy in Serbia.

**Keywords:** *university sports, students, education*

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## INTRODUCTION

The existence of sports (in the widest context of understanding) in higher education institutions, especially physical education (in organized and regular forms of physical exercise) needs to be treated as a determinant of a specific multidimensional system where education, moral, ethical, aesthetic and socially responsible aspects, necessary for the correct formation of young people into complete personae, complement each other. Using all potentials of sports science (mainly in the field of movement-functional structures) sport and physical education (exercising) at universities need to have a role of a specific corrector of balance, which can today clearly be viewed as imbalance between a person's physical and other dimensions. Especially in the view of global presence hypokinesia which dramatically threatens health of youth (Nesic, 2013). One of the important reasons for directing the attention of the academic public to the values of sport and its presence at university, lies in the recognized trend of youth inactivity. Today, this increasingly pronounced phenomenon is explicitly positioned as a global problem. The trend of reduced physical activity (physical exercise) is particularly notable in the period of transfer from high school environment (where physical education at least exists as a regular subject) into university (organized physical exercise doesn't exist as a compulsory concept during studies) which is confirmed by a few more recent studies (Andrijasevic, Pausic, Bavcevic and Ciliga, 2005; Siric, Blazevic and Vladovic, 2009; Nesic and Kuburovic, 2011; Nesic, 2012; Lolic, Nesic, Srdic and Fratric, 2012; Nesic, Srdic and Fratric, 2013; Colleen, Conley, Travers and Bryant, 2013; Popeska, Janevik-Ivanovska, Barbarev and Jovanova-Mitkovska, 2014; Popeska and Sivevska, 2016; Malcic and Maric-Jurisin, 2018).

In the former academic environment of Serbia/Vojvodina (within former Yugoslavia) physical education (sports) was given a huge importance. Faculties and colleges were recognized as places nurturing the activities and values of university sports creativity. However, after 1998 (when the Law on Universities was passed) sport activities in the academic area of Serbia were almost extinct. Few sports sections and associations, which still existed after this period, were more of an expression of elements and routines, i.e. an endeavour of individual activists-enthusiasts, than a well-designed and purpose-

ful part of the higher education system. Even the more active private initiative in the field of academic education in Serbia in this segment didn't make any important contribution.

Despite the fact that in the past few years, there are indications of a more active relation to university sports, which is defined as a strategic priority in the area of sports (Strategy, 2015), the return of physical education in the shape of organized physical exercise to higher education institutions in Serbia/Vojvodina still has not explicitly occur. Even though universities support certain forms of sports activity on paper, supporting student sport competitions (which are mainly occasional and/or *ad-hoc* activities of student organizations or the University Sports Association as a non-governmental organization), physical exercise (organized form of kinesiology activities) is still not incorporated into the work of faculties and colleges. Unlike other countries in the region (example: Croatia) where different models of organized kinesiology activities are a compulsory part of studies in specific semesters (Gelemovic and Svoboda, 2010; Granic, Hraste and Markovic, 2014), in Serbia/Vojvodina education content connected to kinesiology activities is included only in higher education institutions (faculties and colleges) which, by their nature, educate sport professionals (Faculty of Sport and Physical education). At others (known as "non-kinesiology" faculties), only individual positive examples can be singled out<sup>2</sup>.

So far in the frame of the academic community of Serbia/Vojvodina there has not been enough will, and consequently, there has been a lack of concordance to give this topic the necessary (and much bigger) attention. Until now, faculties and colleges mostly dealt with the questions of existential character, also problems of personal functioning and surviving in the higher education market. Resolving the position of university sport and reaffirming its values at university requires joint effort of competent government institutions and the entire Serbian academic area (Rados and Nesic, 2010). With this attitude of the professional and scientific public, the intentions of the Bologna process should definitely be kept in mind, as the premise "student in the center of attention" has to be understood and treated in a comprehensive way. In other words, the needs and interests of students have to be identified, appreciated and satisfied in all forms during their academic life, not just, as it is now, only within the education process. In this sense, identifying their interests and preferences in regard to sports/kinesiology content has to be the basis for creating an "offer" of extracurricular activities in higher education institutions. And also a reason to more intensely detect the purposefulness of the reaffirmation of the idea to introduce of physical exercise (physical educa-

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<sup>2</sup> In AP Vojvodina (R. Serbia) only the curriculum of the Faculty of Economy in Subotica (of all "non-kinesiology" faculties) includes courses such as Collective sports, Individual sports and Activities in nature, which participate in the ECTS credit system

tion classes) as a component of the curricula at higher education institutions in Serbia/Vojvodina. In that context, the authors recognized the need for this research, and created the framework of the empirical part of the study.

## METHOD

The research was conducted as an empirical non-experimental study (*Survey*). The goal was to identify the attitudes and thoughts of students about the role of sport and organized physical exercise at university. The sample of examinees was taken from the population of students in two Vojvodina's universities (University of Novi Sad and Educons University from Sremska Kamenica), formed from randomly selected examinees who were at their faculties at the time of collecting data, comprising a sample of 227 examinees in total. The study included a total of 8 faculties, which in line with the nature of the research were sub sampled in two groups: (1) faculties whose education programs dominantly cover the area of physical education and sports, on this occasion named as "Kinesiology faculties" (the Faculty of Sports and Tourism and the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education from Novi Sad, and also the Study Group for Sports Coaches of the College for Educators and Coaches from Subotica) and (2) faculties from other scientific fields, in the research referred to as "Non-kinesiology faculties" (the Faculty of Technical Science, the Faculty of Sciences, the Faculty of Agriculture, the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Medicine, all in Novi Sad).

As part of the empirical part of the research, survey was used as basic research technique, and the instrument was constructed in the form of questionnaire, whose basic semantic structure was found on similar instruments used in earlier studies (Nesic, Fratric and Ilic, 2010; Nesic and Kuburovic, 2011; Nesic, Srdic and Fratric, 2013), additionally itemized for this research. The variables were divided into two groups: (1) independent (specific personal characteristics of the examinee – the faculty they attend) and (2) dependent (attitudes of examinees regarding certain aspects of sport at university). A part of the questionnaire which was used for the evaluation of attitudes regarding university sports was constructed in the shape of a 10-degree scale (Likert type), where value 1 (one) expressed the lowest, while 10 (ten) expressed the highest degree of agreement with an item indicator (a claim). A total of 13 item-indicators was formed, with the following content (claims): 1) Compulsory sports activities at faculties would represent unnecessary pressure for students (S1); 2) Instead of compulsory classes of physical education at faculty, student should be more supported to voluntarily workout in fitness centres (S2); 3) Sports activities of students within their faculty would enable them to get to know their colleagues better (S3); 4) Doing sports at faculty

would disturb students during exam periods (S4); 5) Sports competitions at universities would be just “a waste” of time and money (S5); 6) University sport in Serbia involves just a small number of students (S6); 7) At faculties, there should be compulsory classes of sport activities - physical education (S7); 8) Sports competitions between faculties should be organized more frequently (S8); 9) Compulsory physical education classes should be introduced into the system of ECTS points (S9); 10) The faculty should organize compulsory sports activities for students at least two times a week (S10); 11) Elite athletes should have special treatment if compulsory physical education was introduced at the faculty (S11); 12) Sports activities at the faculty should only be a matter of students’ personal preference (S12); 13) It is better that students have compulsory physical education, even if they would go there unwillingly, than to be physically inactive (S13).

The evaluation of the results was published with the application of adequate statistical procedures which were adjusted to the nature of the empirical data. For all the variables whose data was expressed with minimally ordinal level of measuring, representative measurements of central tendencies and measurements of variability were calculated - arithmetic mean (*Mean*) and standard deviation (*Std. Dev.*) while distributional frequency was used for the variables expressed with a nominal level of measurement. For testing the importance of differences between scalar averages derived for different subsamples, a single factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied, while the chi-square test (Chi-Square) was used to test differences between the distribution of empirical frequencies of answers of different categories.

The character of the research also required to observe certain characteristics of examinees, primarily from the aspect of their faculty differentiation. In this research, which included a total of 227 examinees, most examinees were male (M=58.6%; F=41.4%). In relation to faculty profiling, there were more students from kinesiology faculties (63.4%). This is, above all, a consequence of the sample availability, not a tendency toward a specific interest according to the study program. In any case, samples can be considered as relevant in the context of belonging to the student population and characteristics of Vojvodina’s academic field. The average age of the examinees was 23.18 years.

In terms of the specific characteristics of the samples in relation to the habit of engaging in physical exercise and doing sports before enrolment in faculty, it is evident that most of them regularly did sports (57.7%). In this group of examinees, as expected, students of kinesiology faculties were dominant (45.8%). About a third of examinees (29.1%) exercised occasionally, while 13.2% were active only at physical education classes in their schools (Table 1). In this context the frequency of doing sport and/or sports/recreational activities after enrolment in faculty was also identified, i.e. in the period during their studies. What is clearly noticeable is a drop of regular active

engagement in sports (18.9%), while physical exercise dominantly moves to the categories of regular (26.9%) and occasional (27.3%) forms of sports-recreational activities (Table 2). The perceived differences between subsamples of students with different faculty profiling were also noticed at a statistically important level (Sig.= .000). These results were in accordance with some earlier studies which speaks in favour of reduced interest of student population in regular sports activities, i.e. a deficit of regular physical activity in their free time (Group of authors, 2006; Stepanovic-Ilic, Videnovic and Plut, 2009; Nestic and Kuburovic, 2011).

**Table 1.** *Sample characteristics - physical activity before enrolling in faculty/college*

Physical activity before enrolling in faculty/college	Type of faculty		Σ
	Kinesiology	Non-kinesiology	
Exercise only at physical education classes	8 3,5%	22 9,7%	30 13,2%
Periodically training at a club or sports school	32 14,1%	34 15,0%	66 29,1%
Regular engagement in sports and competitions	104 45,8%	27 11,9%	131 57,7%
Σ	144 63,4%	83 36,6%	227 100,0%

$$\chi^2 = 38,221 \quad \text{Sig.} = ,000$$

$\chi^2$  – chi square value

Sig. – identified level of statistical significance

the level of significance of statistical inferences - ( $p < ,05$ )

**Table 2.** *Sample characteristics – perception of current daily physical activities*

Current daily physical activity	Type of faculty		Σ
	Kinesiology	Non-kinesiology	
Does not exercise, does not play sports	5 2,2%	4 1,8%	9 4,0%
Exercises rarely	16 7,0%	36 15,9%	52 22,9%
Exercises periodically	32 14,1%	30 13,2%	62 27,3%
Exercises regularly	55 24,2%	6 2,6%	61 26,9%

Trains and competes every day	36 15,9%	7 3,1%	43 18,9%
Σ	144 63,4%	83 36,6%	227 100,0%

$$\chi^2 = 58,223 \quad \text{Sig.} = ,000$$

$\chi^2$  – chi square value

Sig. – identified level of statistical significance

the level of significance of statistical inferences - ( $p < ,05$ )

Different aspects of the role of sports at university were valued by the examinees by giving answers to thirteen item-indicators, where they expressed their attitude that reflects their actual perception of this problem. The results of the scale as a whole clearly indicate that students have a positively oriented attitude to the role and importance of sports at university (6.65), but that the intensity of positivity of attitudes significantly differentiated (also at statistical level of importance; Sig. = .000) in relation to the group of faculties. As expected, significantly higher intensity of positive attitudes (for the scale as a whole) is expressed by students of kinesiology faculties (7.04), compared to students from non-kinesiology faculties (5.98). This general orientation of the prominence of attitudes towards university sports gets its clearer explanation when individual indicators are analysed (they can also be viewed as characteristic mini scales) (Table 3). Extremely positive evaluation in both subsamples is observed in indicators that indicate the perception of sports at the university as an activity that has a dominant socializing role, or as a useful means of social interaction (*Sports activities of students within the faculty would contribute to better acquaintance with colleagues* / S3 = 8.17; and *Sports competitions between faculties should be organized as often as possible* / S8 = 8.10). Also, it is noted that both subsamples do not perceive sports at university as an activity that would have disruptive connotations in relation to basic student obligations during the school year, which is confirmed by scalar averages of indicators (S1 = 3.51; S2 = 4.80; S4 = 3.64; S5 = 2.47). That is, in the inverse interpretation of their semantic basis, the role of sports is not perceived as a disruptive factor in relation to semester and exam obligations, and sports competitions at university would not be an unnecessary "waste of time and money". On the other hand, students from different groups of faculties have a slightly different perception of certain aspects of the role of sports within the university, which primarily relate to the possible benefits for certain groups of students. Thus, for example, students of kinesiology faculties believe that elite athletes should have a somewhat more privileged treatment compared to other students if compulsory physical education classes were introduced at the faculties (S11 = 6.85 / 4.54), which is understandable given their more intense involvement in sports. On the other hand, students of non-kinesiology faculties are less "in the mood" to introduce

sports activities or physical education classes at faculties as a mandatory category ( $S7 = 8.07 / 5.87$ ), which corresponds to the opinion on the prevalence of evaluation of possible physical education classes through the system of ECTS credits ( $S9 = 7.51 / 4.49$ ). A significant difference can be noticed in the question of the possible way of realization of physical education, where students of kinesiology faculties mostly think that it should be a compulsory category for all students, and not exclusively a matter of personal choice ( $S10 = 7.93 / 5.20$  and  $S12 = 5.91 / 7.81$ ). However, both subsamples of respondents similarly (positively) perceive the role of physical education in raising the quality of life, i.e. its potential benefits as a means of compensating for the negative consequences of modern youth life, primarily hypokinesia ( $S13 = 7.76 / 6.67$ ).

**Table 3.** Student perception of university sports

Indicator	Type of faculty (Sv)		$\Sigma$ (Sv)	F	Sig.
	Kinesiology	Non-kinesiology			
S1	3,17	4,10	3,51	4,968	,027
S2	4,47	5,37	4,80	4,562	,034
S3	8,33	7,90	8,17	2,141	,145
S4	3,35	4,16	3,64	4,477	,035
S5	2,69	2,08	2,47	4,076	,045
S6	6,40	6,24	6,34	,164	,686
S7	8,07	5,87	7,26	31,204	,000
S8	8,53	7,35	8,10	12,196	,001
S9	7,51	4,49	6,41	46,662	,000
S10	7,93	5,20	6,93	48,233	,000
S11	6,85	4,54	6,00	31,516	,000
S12	5,91	7,81	6,60	23,097	,000
S13	7,76	6,67	7,36	6,984	,009
$\Sigma$	7,04	5,98	6,65	52,884	,000

*F* – coefficient of variance

*Sv* – Middle value

*Sig.* – identified level of statistical significance

the level of significance of statistical inferences - ( $p < ,05$ )

Some previous research and studies (Stepanović, Videnović and Plut, 2009; Lolić, Nešić, Srdić and Fratrić, 2012; Pehlić, 2014; Nešić, Srdić and Jezdimirović, 2016) have found that the trend of physical inactivity is generally very present in young people, including in Serbia (Vojvodina), which certainly has a student population. Therefore, in our research, it was interesting to determine the basic reasons for potential lack of participation in organized forms of physical exercise within the faculty. Respondents evaluated this seg-



ment of their perception with scores on a five-point scale (score 1 = lowest importance of indicators, up to 5 = highest importance of indicators). The results show that students see as the most important reasons for not practicing sports and physical exercise within the faculty: poor or non-existent sports infrastructure in higher education institutions (overall scalar processes are very high: lack of training conditions at the faculty = 4.11; unsatisfactory quality of exercise space = 4.00) (Table 4). In this context, no statistically significant differences were recorded between subsamples (Item 8 / Sig. = .267 and Item 2 / Sig. = .434), which may indicate the presence of a generally negative perception of material and spatial conditions that faculties provide in terms of potential reaffirmation of sport and physical education at university.

**Table 4.** Possible reasons for rejecting physical exercise at faculty

No	Reason for not exercising	Type of faculty		Σ (Sv)	F	Sig.
		Kinesiology (Sv)	Non-kinesiology (Sv)			
1.	Loss of valuable time for studying	2,51	2,72	2,59	1,345	,247
2.	Unsatisfactory quality of exercise space	4,03	3,93	4,00	,616	,434
3.	Low hygiene in sports facilities	2,67	2,23	2,51	6,575	,011
4.	Insufficient information about importance of exercise	3,80	2,83	3,44	27,794	,000
5.	Aversion to sports	2,72	2,35	2,59	4,382	,037
6.	Interference with use of free time	2,92	2,77	2,86	,604	,438
7.	Aversion to group exercise	2,65	2,36	2,54	2,661	,104
8.	Non-existence of conditions for practice at faculty	4,06	4,20	4,11	1,239	,267
9.	Lack of money	2,94	3,31	3,07	4,221	,041
10.	Limited offer of exercise programs	3,76	3,66	3,73	,436	,510

*F* – coefficient of variance

*Sv* – mean

*Sig.* – identified level of statistical significance

the level of significance of statistical inferences - ( $p < .05$ )

## DISCUSSION

The source of the reasons for the still vaguely defined conceptions of the systemic organization of sports (physical exercise) within the universities in Serbia can be viewed multidimensionally. From conceptual and organizational factors (normative regulation through laws and bylaws of higher education, interdepartmental (non) cooperation of the state apparatus on the implementation of a clear concept of physical education and sports at universities, etc.), through infrastructural factors (sports and university infrastructure, material conditions) for the realization of kinesiology programs at faculties, the way of hiring professional staff of kinesiology provenance, etc.), to socio-environmental factors (life habits and lifestyles of young people, social trends, living and working environment, economic power of the population, etc.). Also, one of the important questions is the way of implementing the idea of reaffirmation of sports / physical exercise at higher education institutions in Serbia / Vojvodina: is the "winning combination" a normative-compulsory form (to impose physical exercise through a system of compulsory university content) or is it individual-decision-making way (the student decides on the way and form of kinesiology contents that they can practice at "their" faculty; the higher education institution only provides material-spatial conditions for conducting sports programs).

Currently, the concept of university sports in Serbia is predominantly based on occasional sports events (competitions) of the student population. Either in the form of individual ad-hock tournaments in different sports which, for various motives or reasons (usually when celebrating some important dates of a particular higher education institution) are independently organized by faculties or as student-athlete competitions within the organizational form of the University Sports Federation of Serbia (as part of an international sports organization FISU). This means that the phrase university sport manifests itself, essentially, as the engagement of active athletes who are also students, and not as the reflection of a system in which most students are regularly athletically active at "their" faculty (and sports competitions are only a consequence of regular physical education and tailored to the characteristics of the participants). In other words, the current position of the majority of the student population within university sports in Serbia can be characterized as passive (spectator), while the direct participants have only an "additional" obligation to sports that they already actively practice within "their" sports clubs.

In Serbia, the importance of university sports is emphasized declaratively, at the level of goals and tasks set in the government document Sports Development Strategy (significant improvement of university sports; providing special conditions when enrolling into higher education institutions

and special study conditions (in accordance with the law) for elite athletes); improving material and technical conditions for the implementation of university sports activities, increasing the number of sports sections and other extracurricular sports activities within university sports, increasing student participation in university sports competitions, improving professional pedagogical work and improving institutional cooperation in university sports, encouraging more intensive involvement of local self-government units in the realization and improvement of university sports; etc.) (Strategy, 2015). Although quite well and affirmatively defined goals and tasks, through the additional appointment of stakeholders in the Action Plan for the period 2014-2018, in the real environment and current practice, specific determinants for their implementation (as well as the implementation itself) within the higher education system have not received their real vitality. In Croatia, for example, the basic goal of "physical and health culture" in higher education is to preserve and improve the health status of students through appropriate forms and programs of physical exercise as a basis for creating lifelong exercise habits. Also, a very important goal is to actively recognize the interests of students as certain types of kinesiology content, which is the basis for, above all, implementing health aspects of compulsory kinesiology content in higher education more efficiently (Ganić, Hraste and Marković, 2014).

The role of sports at university should be considered through the context of the way of life of young people in the wider living environment. Today, it is already recognized with certainty that the level of physical and working abilities of the population is permanently decreasing, so that its health is unequivocally adversely affected. Recent studies (Kvaak, Meyer and Tverdal, 2004; Myint et al., 2007; Međedović, Perić and Ahmetović, 2013; Nešić, Perić, Ahmetović and Zubanov, 2014) confirm this and warn of the fact that the level of physical and work ability of the population, especially young people, is very low. The student population is probably most affected by current social and life phenomena and tendencies. The problems of physical inactivity of young people are especially pronounced when we keep in mind that in the last twenty years there has been no obligatory physical exercise at universities in Serbia. An increasing number of studies in their findings draw attention to the problematic aspects of physical (non) exercise of the student population in general, and especially within universities (Nesic and Kuburovic, 2011; Nesic and Kovacevic, 2011; Medjedovic, Peric and Ahmetovic, 2013; Ahmetovic and et al. 2014; Hraste, Marković and Jelaska, 2014; Malčić and Marić-Jurišin, 2018). In addition, there is a very low level of information about healthy lifestyles (Grandić and Letić, 2009; Nešić, 2012; Lolić et al., 2012). What can serve as an illustration are the results of a study (Ahmetović, Perić et al., 2014) where it was identified that students of the so-called sports faculties possess a higher level of knowledge about healthy lifestyles, as expected, compared to

students of other faculties. However, the authors found that, despite a higher level of information, students of sports faculties did not have significantly higher functional abilities, as well as better nutritional habits (Nešić et al., 2014).

One of the important aspects of higher education (through all its segments) is to promote the formation of attitudes, opinions, values and critical thinking (Gajić, 2011). Students, as the central stakeholders of higher education institutions, with their opinions and attitudes form a kind of framework for evaluating the outcomes of the processes that are realized at universities. Therefore, the identification of their needs is one of the key factors in creating a quality service environment for each faculty, where sports / kinesiology content should take its active (and very attractive) place in the service system. This, among other things, can be one of the important conditions for student satisfaction (as key "clients" of higher education). Because their satisfaction is the overall response to the whole system of "university product" which is, of course, much more than the curriculum and experience / knowledge as a result of learning. The contents of university sports, i.e. the availability of regular physical exercise programs within faculties and universities can be helpful in creating an atmosphere of satisfied (and motivated) users, primarily students, but also all other stakeholders in higher education (parents, teachers, employers, donors, etc.). Creating an environment of positive customer satisfaction, as stated by Kotler and Fox (Kotler and Fox, 1995, p. 41), should be the primary goal that will contribute to the quality of educational institutions.

When it comes to the perception of the role of sports at university (as well as sports in general) of all actors in higher education, it is necessary to have knowledge of its essential values, which can be grouped into three parts (Nešić, 2013): (1) biological and health, 2) socio-cultural and (3) ethical-educational. Their (re) affirmation through the concept of university sports (physical exercise at universities) should be more intensively present within the academic community. All the more so because sports at the university are still considered by a number of academic subjects as a meaningless activity (or, at best, as a "necessary evil"), and there are also those who argue that the time students spend on college sports fields is 'time lost from studying' (Radoš, 2011). Therefore, it is recommended that the modern phrase university sport be treated and based on Plato's idea of kalokagatia, which points to the need to establish a harmonious unity of human physical, intellectual and spiritual abilities (Radoš and Nešić, 2010). This is supported by the results of certain studies on the level of physical activity of the student population (Bourne, 2000; Ćurković, Bagarić, Straža and Šuker, 2009; Nikolić and Pahić, 2011; Nešić, Srdić and Fratrić, 2013; Malčić and Marić-Jurišić, 2018) which show a tendency of decrease in students from year to year. They also indicate an evident decline in physical activities at the transition of young people to early

adulthood, with the largest decline occurring during study (Kwan, Cairney, Faulkner and Pullenayegum, 2012). The tendency to give up participation in sports, among the youth population, is already visible in the upper grades of high school. Recent tendencies observed in practice show that the interest in organized and permanent physical activity among high school students is minimal and predominantly directed towards less physically demanding activities. Also, several studies in Croatia have identified and explained the interest in physical exercise in the student population (Hraste et al., 2014; Vračan, Pisačić and Slaćanac, 2009; Gelemanović and Svoboda, 2010) and pointing out that the assumption that by implementing only kinesiology contents that are interesting for students, would create conditions for greater involvement in sports activities, and thus lead to lasting habits for physical exercise.

## CONCLUSION

The perception of the role of sports / physical exercise at university by students is a very important determinant for the creation of program content, concepts and implementation of physical education in higher education institutions in Serbia. A clear picture of the value aspects of university sports and regular physical exercise in students is necessary to develop and form through two basic forms: cognitive cognition (education) and empirical (participation in kinesiology activities). In that sense, it would be necessary to develop more intensively the environment at higher education institutions, which would be stimulating for more active implementation of the idea (for now still declarative) about the essential reaffirmation of university sports. That is, the concept of regular physical exercise of students. In support of this, the results of this study can be useful and can be summarized through the following findings:

- most respondents reflect the characteristics of their peers from the population in the context of regular sports activities during the high school period;
- there is a trend of decrease of regular sports activities after enrolment in faculty, i.e. at the beginning of studies, and physical activity (in previously active athletes) is mostly directed towards occasional forms of sports and recreational activities;
- the majority of respondents had a positive general attitude towards the role of sports in higher education institutions, and the recognition of its primarily social role is dominant (it creates conditions for easier social interaction of students);;
- sports content at university is perceived by respondents as a potentially good factor for improving the quality of life, so they do not

perceive it as a possible disruptive activity in fulfilling other faculty obligations;

- the basic reasons students give for not practicing regular sports and / or sports-recreational contents on a regular basis are the factor of sports infrastructure of higher education institutions (poor or non-existent), as well as lack of awareness (knowledge) about the values and benefits of regular physical exercise.

The problem of physical (in)activity of young people, although already clearly recognized in the environment of the Serbian academic space, has not yet received adequate attention. Both in terms of systemic theoretical and empirical research, as well as in appropriate active institutional support (especially at the level of higher education institutions). Although educational "authorities" declaratively advocate and formally emphasize the importance of sports at university, there is still no clear and time-determined concept of sports development (regular physical exercise) at higher education institutions in Serbia. This results in the still visible, spontaneous and uncontrolled existence of some forms of sports at the university. Successes in student sports competitions are primarily the result of sports organizations outside the education system, rather than organized sports life within the universities. Students, among other things, do not have their own facilities for training and competition at the faculties, nor a clearly and professionally designed system of practicing sports activities appropriate to their interests and needs.

In this regard, the results of this study direct attention to the area of education and training. Both the student population and the academic community as a whole, where university teachers cannot be amnestied from "ignorance" of the values and role of physical exercise (as determinants of a healthy lifestyle and active lifestyle). It is especially important to point this out and impose it more actively as a problem issue among decision makers in the academic community. Therefore, the pedagogical implications of this research can certainly be largely related to the management structures of higher education institutions in terms of a clear message about the need for more intensive education of all educational stakeholders on the values and importance of physical activity (physical exercise) of young people. In that light, also encouraging changes in the overall education policy in Serbia.

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