

## Evaluation for Najmaldin Al-Taesh's doctoral dissertation entitled Sport for Everyone

### Evaluating Accessibility in Outdoor Public Spaces with Attention to People with Disabilities

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The dissertation deals with the accessibility of urban spaces and parks for sports purposes. The importance of the topic is beyond question, but it is not easy to say anything new on the subject; it is, so to speak, a well-worn topic.

The evaluator is neither a sports expert nor a politician responsible for sports, nor even a landscape designer, and for an architect, accessibility is only a peripheral issue in the practice of their profession, one that must of course be addressed, but is no more important than fire safety, structural integrity, and especially aesthetics. So, of course, there are comments on the dissertation, but these can be considered as external, lay opinions, and it is not entirely clear why an architect was given this role in relation to the dissertation, but let's see the comments!

**Evaluation of the dissertation title** "*Sport for everyone, Evaluation of the accessibility of outdoor public spaces, with particular regard to people with disabilities*"

The title is unnecessarily long; the dissertation deals with the **accessibility of public spaces for sports**.

#### The aim of the dissertation:

*"to methodologically identify physical barriers in the city and between buildings that are perceptible to runners with disabilities."*

*"to draw attention to the importance of accessibility."*

Unfortunately, we do not have a method, and the political declaration cannot be evaluated scientifically.

#### Structure

After a brief introduction, there are essentially **four studies**, each with its own introduction, methodology, results, summary, and bibliography, followed by a summary and recommendations.

There is a lot of repetition between the introduction and the studies, especially in their introductions.

**Comments** on the introduction: although according to the WHO, 1 billion people may be disabled (and according to AI, this figure is now 1.3 billion), which exceeds the indicated 15%, this data is misleading in this context and may not even be necessary.

In Hungary, according to the 2022 census, 272,500 people identified themselves as disabled, which is approximately half of the 2001 figure (577,000). In percentage terms, this represents 2.8% (total population 9.6 million) compared to 5.6% previously (total population 10.2 million in 2001) according to the Central Statistical Office (Hungary).

In Poland, the proportion of people with disabilities is 10.5%. (as of December 31, 2024)

With regard to the use of running tracks and other public sports facilities, it would be worth specifying the target group: excluding those who are unsuitable due to illness, e.g. an elderly person confined to bed should not be included in the statistics for running tracks, and other disabilities do not necessarily allow for sports participation.

In the introduction, you write about motivation that there is limited knowledge about what specific factors encourage or hinder participation in sports, for example, with particular reference to outdoor running tracks.

#### Evaluation of methods

Many different methods are used, and there is no single research method.

On the one hand, he filters out articles that seem interesting from various databases, then narrows them down further so that the remaining ones can be dealt with realistically. He often refers to these articles, always without criticism.

It conducts questionnaire surveys (PARCS) and its own fieldwork, observation, photography, and statistical evaluation tools. In the case of the questionnaire survey, the author's own method is not sufficiently distinct from the research referred to but conducted by others. The target group of the questionnaire survey seems uncertain, and no attempt is made to compensate for the distortions caused by the narrow selection. The first question in the questionnaire is *1. the type of street surface that is important to a runner. (this needs to be evaluated) and the result is that physically disabled and visually impaired runners agree that different types of running surfaces are important to runners.* This was a preconception when the question was asked.

### **Practical benefits of research**

That's a difficult question. Because a critical comment is too weak to be the only result.

In the practical results, the candidate writes in one place that

*In order to create sporty cities that are accessible to everyone, it is essential that authorities, experts, and urban planners work together.* Yes, he is right, of course, but what are his own research findings? What is new? Wasn't cooperation necessary before?

Elsewhere, he writes that *By increasing the number of sports facilities and ensuring their proximity to residential areas, we can encourage more people to participate in sports and physical activity.* Yes, he is right about that too, but here too the question is: what are the results of his own research? What is new? It also states that *While certain characteristics of public spaces can promote sports and physical activity, other characteristics can be obstacles and have a negative impact on participants.*

Elsewhere, he writes that *In order to increase the inclusiveness of sport, it is necessary to recognize the concept of sport for all, which is capable of addressing the barriers and needs that exist in sports and recreational spaces.*

Unfortunately, neither a **concept** nor a **political declaration** of this kind will help.

He also writes that *Urban planners should prioritize the revitalization of areas between buildings in order to improve accessibility, removing all barriers that may encourage and facilitate the participation of people with disabilities in street running.* Such a statement shows serious bias and tunnel vision, because as important as accessibility is, there are other considerations, such as traffic safety and drainage in the case of curbs, which must also be taken into account. The problem is that this has nothing to do with science; it is a **political statement** that does not belong in a scientific article or doctoral dissertation. And we are **not given a method** for identifying obstacles and hindering factors, only examples.

In Study 3, he writes that *The aim of the study is to draw attention to the importance of accessibility.*

Although the author repeatedly refers to Polish standards and rules, and even identifies deviations and irregularities from them, **his purpose is unclear.** Drawing attention is a public, political category that cannot be interpreted in a scientific sense. If the study examined the effectiveness of standards and regulations, it would have a place in a legal study. It might be possible to make suggestions regarding standards, but this is not what this paper does.

### **Regularity issues related to the work**

I have no means of answering the question of classic plagiarism, but from what I have read, I do not think that this is something to consider. However, the question is whether a dissertation that combines four publications, all of which are joint articles with the supervisor, on pages 17-38, pages 39-60, pages 61-74, pages 75-94 (which is 78 pages out of 110, or 71%), can be considered an independent work? Perhaps the **authors should be asked to declare on the percentage distribution of authorship.**

### **Originality of the proposed solution**

This is also a difficult question, because I am not sure what the proposed solution would be!

I would expect the candidate to put forward some theses that represent new scientific findings and to support them in detail in the dissertation in a scientific manner, i.e., with the requirement that any researcher should arrive at the same conclusions based on the same data.

I cannot find these theses, nor any other original statements or hypotheses. The candidate claims that no other study has yet compared the accessibility of public spaces (sports areas and playgrounds) using samples from different countries, which is presumably well-founded, but it is not a proposal or a thesis. The importance of accessibility is well known, and its components are defined in several standards (on which the study also relies).

### **The candidate's preparedness and suitability for independent research**

I can say that the extent of co-authorship determines whether the candidate is suitable for independent research based on the dissertation. If the studies bearing the supervisor's name are the student's independent work, the situation is completely different from one in which the supervisor allowed the candidate to help write the articles, e.g., by collecting material for them. Therefore, suitability cannot be judged on this basis.

Preparedness is an easier question, because the amount of literature referenced on the topic and the number of references confirm this, in my opinion.

### **Minor editing errors**

For unknown reasons, the title is repeated on page IV, and a summary precedes the table of contents. On page V, the contents indicate a bibliography on page 108, but there is no bibliography anywhere. The page numbers are also disordered in other details: Chapter 6 begins one page earlier, and all subsequent page numbers are shifted. According to the list of figures, there should be four figures on page 66, but there is only one divided into three parts. On page 67, there are two figures instead of four, but the page numbers of the subsequent figures are also out of order. The figure on page 10 reappears on page 66, and what's more, the figure labeled "Figure 3 Pathway(surfaces)" on page 67 and the previous two have been swapped from right to left! On page 17, in the name of co-author makes a syntactical error in the first line of the bottom paragraph. In the questionnaire header on page 45, columns 2 and 6 are the same. If this was the case in the original questionnaire, it could distort the results. In many places, the references under the literature titles are missing the publisher, web address, and date.

**I suggest to work a little more on this study** because it involves a lot of work, but there are no filtered scientific results or thesis statements, and unfortunately there is a lot of untidiness and disorder in it. Unfortunately, **it cannot be accepted in its current state**, but I wish the candidate and his advisor a little more perseverance!

Best regards,

Podpisano odręcznie przez autora

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