

Reconstructing Class Sport Practices in Post-Communist Poland

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the changes in attitude of Poles towards sport and recreational activities as well as their participation in these disciplines between the period before system transformations and the present day. Based on examples from literature and own studies, we have observed that Poles have shown a growing interest in sport and recreational activities. Moreover, social diversity of participants in this field has been noted. Sport disciplines and diverse recreational activities perceived as “bourgeois” during the socialist period are becoming more popular among members of the middle and upper classes as potential attractive and clear markers of social status. Interest in sport, skills, knowledge, and sports equipment and outfit in such disciplines as sailing, horse riding, golf, and hunting are thus becoming distinctive social markers. These factors are adopted in the reconstruction of sports practiced by members of different social classes. The continuity of sport practice was abruptly interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War and the following half-century of socialism.

KEYWORDS

social changes, cultural capital, social class, leisure, sport practices, post-communist countries, Poland

Observation of any changes, including social changes, involves the research of processes, i.e., as Nowak suggests, certain human behavior patterns “taking place according to a uniform rule” (translated from Polish, 2007, p. 40). Longitudinal studies, i.e., studies conducted over a period of time, involve the study of life events of individuals, groups, and institutions over shorter or longer periods of time. The measurement of the same variables at least twice in a certain period of time allows any changes to be determined between measurements. Examples of such study may be a one-day experiment in which a pre-test and a post-test after an individual was treated with a stimulus are conducted, or the analysis of secondary data concerning the readership of sport magazines in Europe in the 1980s, based on data collected in 1930, 1970, and 2010 (the examples are purely illustrative and have no connection with the subject of this study). Cross-sectional studies aim at investigating whether any changes took place, what kind of changes, the direction of changes, the relationship between variables, and cause and effect relations. Representatives of the social sciences of

sport have noted changes in many areas: participation in sport, professionalism, the influence of mass media on sport competitions, the (corruption of) morals of sports people, and the understanding of the idea of the Olympic Games. Conclusions concerning these changes are based on two models of study: own studies producing primary data¹ and secondary data analyses, as well as less formal, but more qualitative and methodological case studies and “illustrative cases” (using the term from Flick 2012, p. 59), i.e., illustrations of objects or events which belong to a specific category. In the latter study method, conclusions are more intuitive and the evaluation of changes, their direction, and character (positive or negative) depends on the observation and worldview of researchers themselves.

A second study model may be adopted in analyzing changes in customs, lifestyle, leisure activities, and attitudes toward sport and recreational activities over time. Actually, this is the only method applicable for comparing Polish customs during the 18th century, broadly described by Jędrzej Kitowicz (1970) in his book *“Opis obyczajów za panowania Augusta III”* (a description of customs during the reign of August III), with the present time. Similar intuitive observations were made concerning the differences between distant epochs such as Polish society in the 1970s and in the year 2014, in terms of lifestyle and leisure activities. Having determined the period of time, we can compare the two epochs based on secondary data such as: the number of sports clubs, registered competitors, and sport competitions, as well as sporting facilities per population, declarations of participation in sports, and tourist travel, etc. It is more difficult to adopt the same model when analyzing changes in opinion about a country, the corporeal nature of men, and lifestyle. However, the Social Diagnosis² project reported the results of research into the significant aspects of the life of individual households and their members, both economic and not strictly economic such as: education, medical care, problem-solving, stress, psychological well-being, lifestyle, pathologies, engagement in the arts and cultural events, and the use of new communication technologies. Moreover, Elias (1980/1939) as well as Elias and Dunning (1986) discuss broadly (except from “the history of good manners,” body control, and social changes seen from the evolutionary perspective) the changing habits of passing leisure time and doing sports. A model of comparative and recorded history (including macro-historical analysis based on courtesy textbooks from different epochs) adopted by Elias in his book *“Przemiany obyczajów w cywilizacji Zachodu”* was complemented with a lot of intuition and subjectivity in analyzing changing customs in Western civilization from the 15th to the 20th century (which is a long period of time to be analyzed).

Longitudinal studies concern the formally and empirically immeasurable problems of the new class system and the reconstruction of (or even construction of new) lifestyle within each social class, which will be backed up with empirical examples taken from retrospective and qualitative studies. In contrast with many Western European countries and the United States, the continuity of lifestyle tradition in different classes in Poland was broken or seriously disturbed. This was due to the Second World War and drastic changes in the socio-demographic structure resulting from transportation, relocation, ethnic cleansing, executions of Polish elites and intelligentsia under the Stalinist and fascist systems, followed by many years of communist regime and ideology.³ Kastory and Lipiński address this issue and write about the absence of

“old bourgeois class with a position consolidated through generations and strict lifestyle”
(Kastory and Lipiński, 2012, p. 142).

¹ For example: Dziubiński’s studies on Polish Catholic seminarists’ physical culture (1996, 2004), Jankowski’s studies on physical culture of Polish youth (2010; research carried out in 1989 and 2003), and physical fitness measurements carried out on Polish children in 10 year intervals since 1979 by Trześniowski, Przewęda, and recently by Dobosza (e.g.: Trześniowski R. [1990], Przewęda R., Trześniowski R. [1996] and Przewęda R., Dobosz J. [2003]).

² Longitudinal panel studies carried out in 1991-1997, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2013. Czapiński J., Panek T. [Eds.] (2013).

³ As Norman Davies notices (2010, p. 951): “Social structures have changed dramatically. There was not a single social group that did not suffer losses, but two of them suffered significantly more than others. The intelligentsia was virtually decimated and Polish Jews’ community was almost completely annihilated. After this, there was no return to former patterns of political, cultural, and economical life.”

The most affluent Poles from the top of the ranking lists of the richest people (who are described by Kastory and Lipiński as “overclass” since they are excluded from the traditional three-class structure) could not follow the behavior pattern specific to a family or class, but had to follow the pattern specific to the elite class. The elite comprised only the *nouveau riches*: “almost every member of the economic elite had to strive for being admitted; it was impossible to inherit such a fortune in the communist economy” (Kastory and Lipiński 2012, p. 142). Thus, the situation in Poland is different from the situation in other countries. Societies in France or England are marked by multigenerational tradition of inheriting economic, cultural, and social capital, a clear and stable social structure, as well as specific patterns of behavior in each class. Pierre Bourdieu (2005/1979) in his revealing book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* describes the domination of the upper class over the rest of the society and the use of the educational system to ensure social reproduction.

In socialist countries, sport and leisure activities were under the strict control of the state and served as a model for other spheres of life. Both recreational and professional sports were funded and controlled by the state. Competitive sports were a weapon in the ideological fights in the international arena. Mass sport was perceived instrumentally as a “means of obtaining the fit, disciplined, and co-operative workforce needed for attaining economic and military strength and efficiency” (Riordan 1982, p. 224). Therefore, sports perceived as elite were negatively dubbed “bourgeois” and people were discouraged from practicing them as these sports, as Giulianotti puts it, were “suffused with alienation, ruling-class ideologies” (2005, p. 41), and were a pointless and idle entertainment. Polish sociologists of sport adopted a similar point of view. Wohl (1988) broadly described the ideology of sport in the working class and its separation from the bourgeois sport:

“For classes which had possessions, and especially for the young people belonging to these classes, sport has always been a form of entertainment, an escape from the lavish, but void and boring life” (Wohl, 1988, p. 306);

“the working class is specially interested in sport. Their attitude toward sport is different from the attitude of other classes. For the working class, sport is not an escape from the dullness of everyday life, nor one of many forms of entertainment or a drug [...], but a need resulting from the workers’ lifestyle” (Wohl, 1988, p. 307).

An example of the attitude of the Polish state towards sport and recreation is a badge saying “Fit for Work and Defense,” which was designed in 1950. The badge referred to the most important goals sports culture according to the state. On the other hand, taking into consideration heavy casualties in Poland during the Second World War and having rejected ideological parallels, this case could be interpreted differently. Sports culture was treated like an object almost until the end of real socialism. A breakthrough took place in 1984 when an act on physical culture was passed⁴. The act allowed the physical education classes in rehabilitation and recreational activities to be held (or rather provided) for the first time in the post-war years. These fields of physical education, including tourism, were open to private enterprises. However, the state had a monopoly on physical education and professional sports. Free or almost free access to many sport disciplines allowed diverse social groups to practice sport, thus lessening its elitism. Access to sport was actually unrestricted from the financial perspective. Sailing, horse riding, diving, air sports, and qualified tourism required not so much funds as the knowledge, interest, and determination of participants who worked in sport clubs and organizations such as Towarzystwo Krzewienia Kultury Fizycznej (Society for the Propagation of Physical Culture), Liga Obrony Kraju (National Defence League), Ludowe Zespoły Sportowe (LZS; Popular Sports and Athletics Clubs) funded by the state or state-run institutions. Political transformation in Poland began in 1989 and resulted in cutting down on sport and recreation funds as well as increasing the liberalization and commercialization of sport. The level of involvement in sport and the point of view on different sport disciplines and forms of recreational activity among Poles changed significantly. Jankowski (2010, p. 16) demonstrated that in the first five years of transformation, the funding earmarked for

⁴ The Act on Physical Culture (Ustawa o kulturze fizycznej) dated 3 July 1984 (Journal of Law from 1984 no. 34, item 181).

physical education decreased from 0.5% GDP in 1989 to 0.0114% in 1994. Apparently, without the financial support of the state, certain sport disciplines and recreational activities were not equally accessible to everybody. Therefore, sport and leisure activities became the scene of the diversification of the population and social competition for respect and prestige.

Lenartowicz carried out a survey concerning class determinants of sports practices that drew on the perspective of the class theory of Pierre Bourdieu (Lenartowicz 2012)⁵. Many respondents, who compared their childhood between 1960 and 1980 with the childhood of their own children, emphasized the differences in participation in sports. The example below is a statement taken from an interview with a father whose son plays tennis:

"Yes, things used to be different. I practiced hockey, my brother practiced a little tennis, a little... fencing, I guess, then shooting. And all that at Legia's stadium. But during communism it was for free. So... Parents paid little money for that. I remember that. It was accessible for everyone. In this bygone period it was much cheaper, if not for free. Now we have to pay for it out of our own pockets. It worries me a lot. We have to manage the household finances well, so that there is enough money for everything" (interview no. 11 – tennis, respondent from the upper class)."

"In the old days it was much easier. Nobody actually paid for playing sports. Frankly, I did not pay a penny for my youth sport practices. In contrary – I did receive sport clothes, shoes, everything. No problem. And now you have to pay for everything yourself [...]. Things have changed and in this new context, we may say that some sports are for the elite only" (interview no. 28 – soccer, upper class respondent)."

These statements prove the decrease in the significance of economic capital in socialist countries (including Poland) when deciding on sport disciplines and leisure activities. Cultural capital and social capital were much more significant. The intelligentsia, i.e., the class marked by the highest education and specific ethos, possessed only cultural and social capital. Therefore, they searched for distinctive activities in the field of leisure that were accessible through knowledge, skills, and interpersonal relations rather than financial capabilities. Within university organizations, sport associations, and company organizations as well as without considerable financial outlays, the members of the intelligentsia realized their passions (tourism, climbing, sailing, diving, horse riding, gliding, etc.), which often complemented the status of participation in high culture. These strategies of searching for prestige in a situation of limited economic capital of the intelligentsia in socialist countries were described and illustrated by Bourdieu (2005/1972, pp. 164-165). The difference between Polish and French societies lay in the smaller diversification of French society in terms of economic capital and lack of old bourgeois class in the socialist Poland, although a privileged political class comprising high-ranking state servants and trustees existed in the socialist countries. The so-called *"red bourgeois[...]"*.

"had income and privileges that workers could not even think of [...]. High incomes, low taxes, and lack of luxury goods on the market created among the members of this class the cult of consumptionism which could be dubbed 'bourgeois fetishism'" (Davies 2010, pp. 1056-1057).

However, members of this class had to face (even in times of censorship) public criticism of their behavior. Due to the ideology of equality, ostentatious idleness could not be legitimized and tolerated by the public, thus, the need for dominance was fulfilled with the possession of goods which were perhaps not luxurious, but which were unavailable for the majority of citizens. Members of this class, especially those deprived of cultural capital, lost their position after the transformation. As Eyal, Szeleny, and Townsley (1998) observed, the division of powers and prestige in the case of social structure in the post-socialist

⁵ The study used both qualitative (in-depth interviews) and quantitative methods (a standardised Poland-wide survey). In this paper we refer to the qualitative part of the research which included interviews with 35 parents (24 males and 11 females) of children aged 10-16 years who practiced horse riding (n=7), soccer (n=12), lawn tennis (n=8), and wrestling (n=8). Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed with ATLAS.ti software. All respondents' quotes presented in the text originate from this research.

countries of Central-Eastern Europe in the first years after the collapse of socialism depended to a large extent on the possessed cultural capital. Cultural capital may be defined as general knowledge, institutionalized education, and the possession of habits such as taste and competence in the consumption of culture. Education, position in a state-run institution, and social capital could be exchanged for economic capital in the first years of the transformation. This phenomenon is broadly described in the article on the Polish overclass written by Kastory and Lipiński (2012). Zarycki (2009, p. 108) emphasized the significance of cultural capital in the first years of the transformation and comments on the question of “granting property rights to the nomenklatura.” He argues that:

“the conversion of political capital into economic was successful only for those members of the state apparatus who had cultural capital. In the following years of transformation this tendency increased” (Zarycki, 2009, p. 108).

The new political system and blurring distinctions between social classes due to cultural capital and economic differences influenced the perception of leisure activities, sport, and recreation, which became important markers of social position. The aim of the study conducted by Lenartowicz (2012) was to determine the way in which respondents from different social classes in Poland created personal maps of sport practices and to what extent their overall view of sport and recreation influenced their children. The study, especially its qualitative part, assumed that sport, recreation, and tourism are treated by people from the middle and upper classes not only as significant markers of social status but also as significant elements of cultural capital which their children acquire outside the school environment. Before the transformation, the field of sport was marked by little social diversification, but it became more ordered through the process of social sedimentation of sport practices. Due to economic factors, part of the society had no real choice of forms of physical activities but “the choice of the necessary,” thus representing “the tastes of necessity” (Bourdieu 2005/1979, pp. 458-486), which manifested itself in buying and doing only that which was necessary, reasonable in financial terms, simple, modest, and practical. The problem of financial constraints and “the choice of the necessary” appeared in the interview carried out by Lenartowicz (2012) with respondents from the lower and middle classes:

“My son practices boxing. He started with tennis, but it involved costs of buying all the equipment, renting gyms, and tennis courts. Unfortunately, parents have to pay for that... It used to be better. So Jacek had to give up tennis, cause I couldn’t afford to pay 200 zloty every, I don’t know, week. That’s too much. If I had only one child, I could afford that, but in this case I can’t (interview no. 13 – wrestling; respondent from a lower middle class)” (Lenartowicz 2012).

In Poland there is a deep conviction that certain forms of physical activity are accessible to only a few. One of the respondents practicing horse riding noted (Lenartowicz 2012, p. 120):

“My former boss would say that horse riding is not for people traveling by streetcars. It sounds awful, but it’s true (interview no. 31 – respondent from the upper class)” (Lenartowicz 2012).

“R:⁶ Certain sports are associated with the upper classes.

I: Is horse riding one of them?

R: I guess so. I haven’t thought about it this way, but I think it’s one of such sports. Tennis and sailing also belong to this group. You can boast to friends about practicing such sports (interview no. 30 – horse riding, respondent from the upper class)” (Lenartowicz 2012).

Social demand for such sports is clearly illustrated with statements made by young Poles who have unlimited possibilities and would practice sports such as swimming, tennis, sailing, and horse riding.

⁶ “R” stands for respondent and “I” for interviewer.

However, only swimming appeared on the list of the ten most often practiced sports. The group of elite sports comprised volleyball, basketball, gymnastics, and football (Jankowski 2010, pp. 131-132). In the last quarter of a century the situation almost has not changed. Moreover, it concerned to the same extent people whose youth coincided with the end of real socialism (1989) and young people from the end of the transformation period (2003).

Interest in sports, skills, knowledge, equipment, and outfits for such sports as sailing, horse riding, golf, and hunting may easily become distinctive social markers, as only a small fraction of Poles practice these sports. In the case of forms of physical activity perceived as elite or prestigious, it is necessary to possess competence (physical, objectified, and institutionalized, such as a sailing license or a diver's license), which may be obtained only by a few students and only outside regular physical education classes at school. This concerns tennis, skiing, snowboarding, horse riding, sailing, and windsurfing. These disciplines were seldom if ever mentioned both by children and parents participating in the survey carried out by Lenartowicz (2012). These unique sport skills and experience, together with language and musical abilities, may signify that an individual comes from a good home and possesses cultural capital. Examples of assembling status-defining combinations appeared in the qualitative and all-Poland parts of the interview with respondents from the upper classes. Sport, constituting a part of such combination, may be a valuable part of cultural capital of an individual. It can be assumed that sport, in order to reveal its distinctive character, should be carefully chosen from the sport disciplines and forms of recreation perceived in a given population as elite, cannot dominate over other interests and forms of participation in the cultural life (especially in the high culture), and should be treated intrinsically in the model of post-aristocratic idleness. According to the respondents from the upper classes, sport that is practiced intensively and is treated too seriously as a prevailing form of leisure activity or a main object of interest (it also concerns cheering and viewers of sport transmissions on the television) lost its distinctive appeal. It also concerns professional sports that, apart from being well paid, are not perceived by parents as a potential path to their children's career. It could be assumed that professional sport loses its distinctive values as physical work attractive especially for those who have a limited chance for social advance. When a physical activity is associated with the lifestyle of the upper classes and aristocratic forms of spending leisure time, then it contains a distinctive potential which may be used for building and strengthening one's social status.

Sports and forms of recreation perceived as "bourgeois" during socialism, gain in popularity among members of the middle and upper classes who search for attractive and clear confirmations of their social statuses. Apart from a house on the city outskirts, a brand new car, and designer clothes, factors that determine the social status may also comprise trips to exotic countries, skiing trips, and activeness in sports associated with elitism. Consumption and "high quality" concerning cultivation described by Annette Lareau (2003 and 2011, based on Pierre Bourdieu) on the basis of American families from the ambitious middle class, adopting sport and music activities as well as numerous extra-curricular activities enhancing the "value" of a child among peers, has become a distinctive feature of Polish families from the middle and upper classes. Studies conducted by Henryk Domański in the 1990s demonstrated that only extreme cases represent a distinctive lifestyle comprising also physical activities.

"The vast space between the top of the hierarchy and the very bottom is poorly diversified and unspecified in terms of a specific style" (Domański, 2000, p. 141).

Increasing involvement of Poles in sport and recreational activities (confirmed by research conducted by CBOS in 2013) causes increasing diversification of society in this field. After the first years of the improvement of Poles' financial situation following the economic deprivation of the 1980s and 1990s, expenses on matters of a higher order included services (Gucwa-Leśny, 2007, p. 205), participation in the culture, and participation in sport and recreational activities. Data shows a growing percentage of people who regularly or sporadically practice sports: 26% in 1997, around 40% in 2003 (CBOS 2003), and 66% in 2013 (CBOS 2013). In this field of social competition, the number of "competitors" who use sport and recreational activities as a social marker or at least as a marker of aspiration of social advance is increasing. Observation of the process of formation and change of class-specific sport and leisure activities after the political

transformation has become an engrossing task. This study answered the recommendations of Giulianotti that studies in the field of the sociology of sport should be comparative, longitudinal, and intercultural:

"I advocate a strongly comparative approach across time (historically) and space (cross-culturally). Historical approaches illuminate the continuities and changes within the social structures and practices of specific sports, thereby revealing the social conflicts and transgressions within modern play [...]. We need to identify the sociogenesis of the salient features of postmodernity while recognizing that longer-standing, modern social inequalities remain within the contemporary epoch" (Giulianotti, 2005, p. 212).

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