

## Review paper

# PHYSICAL CULTURE IN THE TRADITION AND RITES OF THE TATAR POPULATION INHABITING POLISH TERRITORY

## *Physical culture of the Tatar population*

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### Abstract

This report presents the findings of a qualitative study on the physical culture of the Tatar community inhabiting Polish territory. Historical elements of the physical culture of the Tatar community have been presented against the background of general characteristics of this ethnic group and the history of the presence of Tatars on Polish soil. The article shows particular aspects of the Tatar tradition of physical culture and its place in Tatar national culture. This is the first known report on the physical culture of this ethnic group on the ground of ethnology or cultural anthropology.

**Key words:** Polish Tatars, physical culture, games and play, ethnology, cultural anthropology

### Theoretical introduction

Physical culture is a term that encompasses more than just physical activity such as professional and amateur sport and physical education; developing and taking care of the body, ensuing from the need to increase work efficiency, motivated by a necessity to satisfy basic existential needs and ensuring their realization on a higher level, or improve a person or group's self defense skills; or the desire to continue and develop a form of physical activity that is characteristic of a given community. Physical culture also comprises the entire local community, nation or state including: the shaping of attitudes, modeling patterns of behavior, shaping conditions of life, forming the environment and mental attitude towards work, rest and play. A holistically-oriented community lifestyle to participate in physical culture, the attitude of its members towards work, rest and play, all create a mechanism of ethos creation and the preservation of patterns in this sphere, generating an axiological system that is not fully realized because of its regulation by social behavior. The term physical culture therefore refers to the whole spectrum of social reality. Selective perception of the issue, based on a simplified dichotomy i.e. sportsmen – non-sportsmen, is highly incorrect and socially detrimental. In traditional societies, where physical activity was an essential element of the everyday life of all community members, divisions of this kind did not occur [1, p. 16-23].

The term „sport” is equally often defined narrowly i.e. as physical competition, but it includes a wide range of forms of physical activity occurring in epochs and cultures that did not know the term. From the ethnological perspective a broader definition should be assumed i.e. all forms of exercise games and play, featuring elements of ludic competition and perfecting the corporal dexterity being the essence of the competition and comprising a rite expressed in the form of a show. Each game is governed by a number of customary and formal rules

comprising all participants and their forms constitute an element of cultural identity shared by the whole community and also determining the social status of individuals. So, at the same time, sport is one form of possible emanation of ludic nature and national identity of a given community [2, p. 31-34].

Elements of physical culture such as games and play of all kinds, being a purely ludic kind of physical activity, originally satisfied the need for rest and recreation in primitive societies, where sport as we perceive it did not exist. The physical culture separated an individual from their duties and the routine of everyday work and provided a counterbalance to these activities. Physical activity is an integral and indispensable ingredient of the culture of every ethnic community and society. Constituting their specific cultural features, sport considerably shapes and strengthens social ties and prepares an individual to perform social roles in a given social system [3, p.132-135]. The socializing functions of physical culture cannot be overestimated.

### A historical outline

Tatars are one of a people that do not have their own state. They constitute an ethnic and religious group and a national minority in the population of several countries of eastern Europe. The first Tatar settlers appeared in the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. They were mainly those who had been taken captive during fighting between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Golden Horde. Their main occupation was military service. Fighting for the legacy after Genghis Khan led to the demise of the state into a number of khanates, among which the Crimean Khanate lasted longest, and was defeated by Russia as late as in 1783. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Crimean Tatars attempted to win independence but failed. In 1944 the Tatars were accused by the Soviet

authorities of collaboration with the Germans and were brutally pacified and taken deep into the Soviet Union. In the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many of them returned and now Crimea has autonomy within the Ukrainian state, whereas the Republic of Tatarstan gained the status of a subject of the Russian Federation. Nowadays Tatars mainly inhabit Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania and Poland. In Poland they are a border nation in the eastern part of the country. They are mainly Muslims but many of them are members of the Orthodox Church [4, passim].

In the second part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Tatars settled in the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian state were gradually losing their language and customs. They used the Polish and Russian languages and only when praying did they use Arabic. They made their names sound more Polish and they assimilated with the local community. In 20<sup>th</sup> century interwar Poland they assumed the name „Polish Tatars”, which meant the Tatars inhabiting the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Tatars settled in the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania until the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on in the Crown of the Polish Kingdom). However, the term was not accurate because the majority of them lived in Lithuania until the end of World War I and they were called Lithuanian Tatars (Muslims). Nowadays the Tatars inhabiting Poland are referred to as Polish Tatars and, in a historical context, as Polish-Lithuanian Tatars. The Tatars settled in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and expressed themselves when writing and speaking exclusively from a dynastic perspective and not in a geographical sense. They did not mention any state when talking amongst themselves or with others, because their attitude towards the state was indifferent. In the Polish and Lithuanian territories, Tatars appeared owing to relations established with the Jagiellonian Dynasty and not as a result of the existence of a formal relation with the Polish-Lithuanian State [5, p. 156]. It appears that the devotion of the Tatars living in Poland to their foster homeland was widely diffused (this view is called into question by the so-called „Lipk's betrayal”, which is less pejoratively called by the Tatars as „Lipk's mutiny”). The view is based on their dedicated military service, first in the Lithuanian and later in the Polish-Lithuanian army and, finally, in Poland's army of the interwar years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Polish state was anxious to receive the Tatars who fled to Turkey, who were useful through their knowledge of the terrain and Poland did not want the Tatars to serve as guides in Turks' military incursions into Poland. An agreement was reached in 1673 when they returned to Poland and they were forgiven for their betrayal, guaranteed freedom of faith and also the right to build mosques. Their rights became equal with that of the Polish gentry. In 1679, as a contribution towards outstanding pay, the Tatars were given the following villages: Bahoniki, Drahle, Malowicze Gorne, Lebiedziew, Malaszewicze and Studzianka [6, p. 194].

Tatars arriving in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were most often refugees from the Golden Horde and Crimea. They frequently belonged to the elders, because they were representatives of aristocratic families. They were gladly received by the Duke Vitold and, obliged to serve in the army, settled on his

land. The Tatar families were granted coats of arms and lands in exchange for their devoted service. Social stratification and, through it, the economic structure of the Tatar community was diverse. Tatar Cossacks came to Lithuania with aristocratic Tatars. Urban Tatars were a separate micro-community who were settled in towns and suburbs and who did not have royal or parliamentary privileges. They paid a tax and earned their living as artisans (mainly as tanners) or were in trade (mainly selling horses) and were also carters and gardeners. The settlers were joined by captive soldiers who were located in Tatar villages in Lithuania, where they earned their living as farmers [7, passim]. The Tatar emigration reached its apogee in the 1430s and the last groups of immigrants entered the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Lithuanian territory was inhabited at that time by around three and a half thousand Tatars. At the turn of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries the first Tatar troops appeared in the Polish-Lithuanian army. They were mainly Hospodar Tatars and descendants of the Ordyn fighters; Cossack Tatars. As a result of wars waged on Moscow a part of the Tatars moved to aristocratic estates in Ukraine. The Cossack Tatars very often worked as diplomats' escorts, couriers or in aristocratic militia. In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century part of the Tatar gentry became Polonized; conversely, the Tatars settled in towns and were subject to Belorussian influence [8, passim; 9, p. 41-69].

Privileges won by Hospodar Tatars who were the leaders of the Tatar community, guaranteed the survival of the nation as a separate social and ethnic group and also the preservation of a certain autonomy and freedom to practice the Muslim religion, both in the period of the First Republic and 1918 restored Poland. In interwar Poland about five and a half thousand Tatars inhabited the country, mainly in the Vilna, Nowogrod and Bialystok provinces. During World War II Tatars suffered severe losses in their social structure, especially among the intelligentsia. As a result of the post-war border changes only two Tatar villages remained in Poland i.e. Bahoniki and Kruszyniany, which is currently in the Podlasie Province. There are also Tatar communities in Bialystok and Sokolka, and, to a lesser degree, in Gdansk, Warsaw and Gorzow Wielkopolski. Tatar settlement is currently restricted to the Podlasie region. Tatars can be found in smaller groups in other parts of the country, being subject to Polonization. Nowadays the Tatar diaspora in Poland amounts to around five thousand people [5, passim].

### Methodology of the study

The paradigm of modern cultural anthropology is the relationship of the culture with the social life of a studied group in its entirety and the main task of ethnology is to prove its cultural specifics [10, p. 11-16]. The study of the Tatar community inhabiting the territory of Poland, was conducted in continuous two yearly cycles during the Sabantuy holiday in Kruszyniany in 2010 and 2011. Therefore the choice of those studied was accidental. The representatives of the Tatar community that were studied came mainly from the Podlasie region, with representatives of smaller groups of Tatars also. A survey method and

\* The military aspect of the physical culture of the Polish Tatars, though (in a historical context) vital for the subject of this elaboration due to the intensive physical activity of the soldiers (the drill and combat, including among others: horse-riding, sword-play, archery, shooting from a firearm, or fighting using shaft arms and cold steel) in modern times is watched in competitions and shows organized on some Tatar holidays. Nowadays in Polish Tatars' everyday life, forms of military related behavior have disappeared. Due to the complexity and the volume of the subject, its whole presentation goes beyond the dimensions of this article and requires individual elaboration. The issues have been studied and described extensively (though at a relatively abstract level) in the following: Borawski P. (1986) Tatars in old Polish Republic, LSW, Warszawa [in Polish]; Borawski P., Dubiński A. (1986) Polish Tatars. History, ceremonies, legends, traditions, Iskry, Warszawa [in Polish]; Kolodziejczyk A. (1997) Debates and studies from history of Tatars lithuanian-polish and in polish islam XVII-XX century. To 600-years on lands of great lithuanian principalities Tatar, opr. J. Tyszkiewicz, Związek Tatarów Polskich, Gdańsk [in Polish]; Miskiewicz A. (1990) Polish Tatars 1918-1939. Life socially-cultural and religious, PWN, Warszawa [in Polish]; Tyszkiewicz J. (1989) Tatars on Lithuania and in Poland, PWN, Warszawa [in Polish].

interview technique was used. The aim was to prove that there is no relation between the culture of the Tatar population inhabiting Poland and the physical activity typical of the ethnic group.

### Physical activity in the rites of Polish Tatars

The most intensive interpenetrating of the legacy of past experiences and the present of the national culture can be found in the field of physical activity (also in the sphere of religion, where the Tatar identity is most plainly visible), which shapes the Tatar national identity. Tradition has been and still is a vital factor conditioning the participation of Tatars in their specific physical culture and also in the sphere of religion, where the Tatar identity is most plainly visible). The level of their physical activity is determined by lifestyle, which is passed from generation to generation, in which a wide range of sports-related activities can be found.

Until the current day the Tatar population has preserved its religious affiliation, national culture, tradition and customs. In eastern Poland, cultural differences, ensuing from a different nationality, were perceived negatively for some time by the Polish majority. This negativity was experienced mainly by the Lithuanians, Belorussians, Ukrainians, and mostly by the minority relatively small as in the case of Tatars who were relatively densely populated peoples, whose percentage in eastern Poland (and in particular local communities) was high. In some periods in history the cultural difference in all aspects of society, was perceived as some kind of „attack on Polishness” [11, p. 42] including in the case of physical culture. Paradoxically, intolerance against Tatars' ethnic differences reached its apogee in 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was triggered by the events on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 and the commencement of the so-called war on terrorism which, as a result of the culture clash, was in practice a war against the Muslim culture. For the Tatars declaring their identity, culture, and first particularly their religion, inhabiting Poland, became very difficult as a result of the xenophobia and prejudice that they experienced.

We can distinguish forms of physical activity that are qualified in ethnology as sport, games and play [2, p. 34] in the physical culture of the Tatar community inhabiting Poland. They are clearly visible in the context of predominantly non-religious Tatar festivals, which are yearly rites related to winning over the forces of nature. Religious i.e. Muslim ceremonies hardly involve any forms of physical activity and they cannot be considered as elements of physical culture [see 12, p. 187-207]. The festivals are the main ethnic characteristic of Tatars and also the strongest and the most permanent factor integrating the Tatar community inhabiting Poland.

Tatar rites related to non-religious holidays, which are characterized by their family nature, are often accompanied by physical activity, often assuming the form of sports competitions. The cycle of yearly secular festivals is headed by the Nevroz holiday, which means the welcoming of the spring. Nevroz is similar to the Slavonic Mid-summer Eve, or Kupala's Night. The holiday is related to the spring equinox. It is celebrated on the 21<sup>st</sup> March. The name of the holiday originates from the Iranian language and literally means „a new day”. The holiday of spring, which is to say the commencement of work in the fields, involves a number of rites to win favor with the forces of nature and ensure a good harvest. The celebrations are accompanied by singing and dancing, when young Tatars visit all the houses in the village and are rewarded with sweets [from accounts gathered when celebrating the Sabantuy holiday in Kruszyńiany in 2010 and 2011]. Nevroz is not popular in the milieu of the Tatars in Poland but is very popular in Crimea and Tatarstan.

The Kydrylez holiday symbolizes the rich and complex history of Tatars, their social life and source of beliefs. It is celebrated on the first Sunday of May. The young often prepare fire close to the river, which is held to be the very bosom of nature. In the evening all the residents gather round the fire. After a communal prayer, the oldest person lights the bonfire and is the first to jump over it. He is followed by other men, adolescents and young boys. As the fire dies down the rite is completed by the women and the girls. When jumping over the fire each person says the magical words of incantation: „Problems for the infidels, and well-being for me”. The common game is obligatorily ended with the common dance of the whole community. This holiday is also not widely practiced in the Tatar community inhabiting Poland but is very popular among the Crimean Tatars.

A century-old history is featured by a spring-renewal holiday called Sabantuy; the “Plow Festival” (similar to Slavonic Dożynki, meaning “harvest festival”). It was originally celebrated before the spring sowing but, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has been held upon completion of the sowing. Sabantuy combines customary rites related to work in the fields and folk games, playing, dances and songs. Traditional sports competitions are held as part of the holiday. The whole community and their guests gather on a specially prepared fairground, which is usually situated on the edge of the forest or in a clearing, and selected participants enter the competition. The festival is opened by a fairground running race comprising different distances and long and high-jump competitions. Whereas the main events of the holiday are two fitness tournaments i.e. Tatar Kuresh wrestling, and the most anticipated and important event; a horse race. Tatars say that even race horses feel the Sabantuy approaching. According to the tradition the main prize was a ram, raised and given by the richest family in the village, and was received by the winner of the competition who gained the name „baatyr”, and owns the title until the following year. Currently the ram is substituted by a rooster. Other prizes given to the winners of the particular events are embroidered shirts, headscarves, tablecloths and towels, all made of the finest fabric. Historically the Sabantuy was so important an event in the life of the community that the community would prepare for it throughout the entire year. Young women embroidered fabrics throughout the winter when there was no work in the fields in order that they be bestowed on the winners of the sports competition. Apart from wrestling and horse races, popular sports include climbing a pole rammed in the ground, often smeared with oil (if there are several competitors the winner is the one who does it fastest); struggle on a beam i.e. fight holding sacks stuffed with hay or straw, which lasts until one of the competitors falls off the wooden beam; the javelin; horseshoe throw, where the winner throws the shoe the longest; lasso throw on the neck of the running horse (or in a simpler variant – on a wooden stilt); tying thongs as fast or as long as possible. The competition is often accompanied by Tatar folk handicraft workshops, songs and dances, Tatar cuisine, horse-riding shows and primitive and Mongolian archery from the ground or from a horse. It is conducive to the popularization of the Tatar culture among representatives of other nations, who are becoming more frequent guests at the Sabantuy holiday. In Poland the holiday has been famous since the „grand” celebration in Kruszyńiany in 2007, and it assumes the form of a great Tatar festival, which presents and propagates the culture of that ethnic group. It also develops agro-tourism, which is run by the Tatar families.

Another non-religious holiday is Jiyens, which celebrates the beginning of summer. During this holiday Tatar families meet in the largest possible family circle. The celebration revolves around frequent and numerous mutual visits and lasts three or four days. Fitness or parlor games and dancing for adults and the youth are organized. The main aim of the festival,

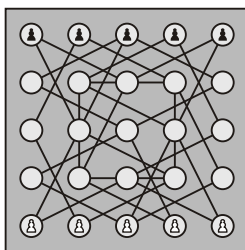


apart from general socializing, is to help the youth make friends with each other and pairing people off. The Jiyens holiday is most popular in Tatarstan.

### An example of a traditional Tatar game – the „Archers”

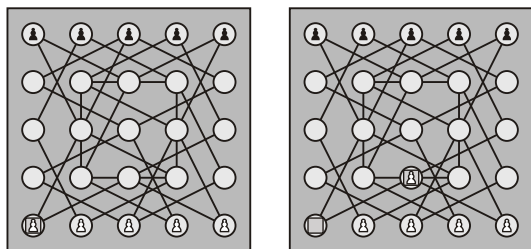
Owing to a centuries-old military tradition, Tatars are often depicted in common knowledge and some scientific elaborations as „a nation of archers” [13, p. 86]. A confirmation of the legitimacy of the epithet, and at the same time a symptom their attachment to the military in playing, is a traditional Tatar board game called „the Archers”. Traditional tales say that Batu Khan himself carried the board and pawns of the game, which he had received from his grandfather, great Temujin. He used to play „the archers” before each battle in order to put his mind in the right frame and mentally prepare for the battle. This ancient game requires increased concentration combined with the ability to observe and efficient use of the players' imagination.

The game takes place on a board where there are five lines and five columns of circles symmetrically connected with each other. The players start the game having five archers in the first line



**Board 1.** Initial set-up of pawns on the board [14].

The basic task of the players is to lead their pawns (archers) to the row initially occupied by the opponent's pawns, and in the meantime take captive as many enemy archers as possible. This is the decisive factor in the game, because it is the number of the points scored i.e. the enemy's pawns (archers) that decides the game. During the game each pawn can only move to an adjacent circle.



**Boards 2 and 3.** The rules of moving pawns on the board [14].

One cannot backtrack on a move more than twice in a row. The move must be made to another available circle. When a player's pawn (archer) reaches the opponent's initial line, it must stay there until the end of the game, or until it is caught by the enemy. When a player's pawn (archer) finds itself on a circle occupied by the opponent's pawn it is „taken captive”, which means it is removed from the board. The archer who captured the „enemy” is specially marked. The player who led his pawn to initial line of the enemy, thus taking it captive, may

put another pawn on his initial line. The action may not be repeated by any single pawn (archer). The game ends when one of the players brings all his pawns to the initial line of the opponent or fills it completely, if he has a larger army i.e. more pawns (archers). The scores are then tallied. The winner is the he who has scored more points. The scoring is summed up as two points for each pawn on the initial line of the opponent and one point for each pawn remaining on other circles of the board. The „Archers” is more than just a physical or mental activity. It is also a symbolic means of conveying the Tatar system of values and a cultural factor integrating the Tatar community, not only through playing but also through creating a sense of being a part of the group.

### Tatar dances

Dances are an essential part of the physical culture of the Tatars inhabiting the Polish territory. Traditional Tatar dances reflect the centuries-old history of that ethnic group, making reference to the important events in the life of the Muslim community, whose most permanent customs are the rites related to the festivals. The organization of dances is compulsory in the celebration of Tatar holidays and also takes place on other occasions.

The systematic organization of dances was initiated by Tatars of the Vilna region at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tatar balls in Vilna were modeled on Polish dances, yet were different because they contained elements of national Tatar dances from various parts of Russia. They were mainly presented by guests who had been invited to balls. As many as 200 people or more attended the balls. The Tatars also invited their Polish friends to the parties, most frequently the Tatars' neighbours, specifically the impoverished gentry of nearby villages and also the Muslims from Crimea and areas on the Volga river. At the parties people not only danced but also discussed political, social and economic issues. The parties brought the community together and were not only restricted to the richest gentry. An impoverished nobleman working in the fields or a poor artisan would not find himself invited to the balls [15, passim].

During World War I no public receptions other than family celebrations were organized whereas during the Second Republic Tatar parties became an inherent element of major social-gatherings and family celebrations. Vilna, Novogrodek and Slonim were famous grand parties and balls. Parties were also held in small Tatar communities such as Kleck, Lachowicze, Mir, Iwanowo and Kruszyniany. In Slonim, inhabitants commemorated the anniversary of the opening of the local Tatar library with a yearly ball organized in the second half of August. From 1936, in the village of Iwanowo, the Nieswiez district, a Tatar harvest festival was held yearly. Every year the local Tatars gathered in Kruszyniany, reveling at tables laden with food and drink, an event that took place most often during Muslim holidays and also on ordinary days. Guests came to feast not only came from the Grodno region but also from more remote places. Arguably the grandest gathering of Tatars inhabiting the territory of Poland was held in August 1936 in Nowogrodek. It involved two balls and the whole event was organized by the local Tatar marksmen. In the Warsaw commune the Tatars organized balls to contact the representatives of Muslim emigration from the Soviet Russia and diplomatic workers. In other regions there were dances during which the Tatar youth enjoyed themselves in rented clubs or in adjusted dayrooms, firehouses and in smaller circles within private homes. At that time Tatar parties were not altogether different from Polish parties [15, passim].

After World War II the Tatar community in Poland became involved in modest dances organized in Bahoniki and Sokolka,

in the Podlasie region. Larger events were held as late as in the second half of the 1950s, when the Tatars of the village of Sołkolka decided to revive pre-war tradition and organized larger parties. The Tatar community of Białystok later the effort to organize balls. Poland-wide reunions also took place. An immense reunion of displaced Tatars was held in Gorzów in August 1962 and, in 1969, in Gdańsk, the tenth anniversary of the local commune was commemorated. After 1945 the Tatars continued to model their parties those of the Polish. Not only were traditional Tatar dances were performed but people also danced to Polish folk melodies. Grand balls often commenced with the Polonaise. Tatar parties would not be complete without a waltz or a tango. The music was played by hired bands or local musicians at village parties. The bands played folk tunes in the Crimean and Volga region, which were propagated mainly by Tatar emigrants from Russia. The tunes aroused emotions. The musicians also played local folk tunes also in Belorussian. The queen of the ball was also elected, as well as the best dancing pair. Both the Tatars and the other guests enjoyed themselves [15, passim].

### Conclusions

An analysis of the material gathered during the survey of the Tatar population inhabiting the territory of Poland (a pilot study the continuation of which may prove worthwhile) has shown that the reunions of the Tatar community, which accompany the holidays, yearly rites, and other gatherings of public character and, in particular, of which physical activity plays an integral part, are of great importance for the strengthening of existing social ties and the formation of new ones. Public playing, being a manifestation of the organization of the social life, crystallizes awareness of ethnic identity and strengthens the sense of national community and the element of competition present in the games triggers solidarity. Whereas cooking traditional Tatar dishes as a joint activity undertaken mainly but not exclusively by women cements social ties and engenders the cooperation and coordination of actions. Moreover, joint physical activity as an integrating factor initiates and intensifies interaction between people and is conducive to the development of interpersonal relations from acquaintance, through friendship, to marriage and also brings distant relatives and compatriots coming from different parts of the country or the entire world closer. The physical culture of the Tatar population and especially its traditional elements, are an important part of shaping and consolidating the national identity of the Polish Tatars.

The study concludes that there are patterns of physical culture and forms of physical activity specific to the Tatar community. The physical culture of the Tatar population features physical activity and has qualities that cannot be found in the culture of other nations and ethnic groups. It refers to both sports issues and everyday behavior that requires physical activity, such as work, rest and religious rites.

The attitudes and patterns of behavior within physical activity or, in a broader sense (also in the axiological dimension), physical culture, constitute an element of the ethnic culture of the Tatars inhabiting the Polish territory; a culture which, contrary to that which could have been predicted in 2002, when the census showed only five hundred people declaring Tatar nationality [16, p. 85-87], is not heading towards an irretrievable decline, yet which, after a period of crisis, has reentered the phase of growth. Paradoxically it is mostly an effect of the process of globalization, which is accompanied by the multiethnicity and multiculturalism propagated and practiced in modern Europe a phenomenon which has been itself driven by the enlargement of the European Union and relative openness towards the immigration of people from other continents, which includes Muslim countries.

Social-political-economic transformation and the processes of democratization, freeing up economic life through the support of legal enterprise (e.g. agro-tourism) and tolerance in social relations (encouraging to emanate otherness e.g. religious one), are conducive to the display of specific expressions of Tatar national culture, including physical culture and traditional forms and standards of life of ethnic groups revive in the sphere of physical culture.

It could be argued that, in the educational policy pursued by the government, the cultural identity of national minorities that are in the course of the social transformation, is not particularly well thought through (and, in practice, solely by local government), which creates barriers to the diffusion of traditional expressions of physical culture that is specific to the minorities. At the local level, ethnic otherness is propagated in the form of grass-roots initiative, minorities realizing it through the religious activity and that of associations. The lack of state support for the culture of ethnic groups considerably limits their potential for auto-promotion and the dominance of the mass culture leaves traditional Tatar cultural values as something to be cherished by the older generation but neglected by the younger generation in favor of commercial values. However, among the Tatar population inhabiting the territory of Poland, the passing of traditional forms of physical activity between generations still functions and the willingness to preserve the national physical culture of the Tatars living in Poland appears to be present. It is the physical culture of that ethnic community that significantly determines the scope and the character of its coexistence with the Polish majority and other minorities, within Polish society.

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