

# The Determinants of Polish Society's Participation in Sport and the Directions of Change

## Authors' contribution:

- F) conception and design of the study
- G) acquisition of data
- H) analysis and interpretation of data
- I) manuscript preparation
- J) obtaining funding

Zbigniew Dziubiński

*Josef Pilsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland*

## ABSTRACT

Sport plays an important role in modern societies, including those in Europe. However, individual countries differ in terms of their citizens' participation in universally accessible sport. In some societies, the percentage of people who pursue different sports is high, while in other countries it is insignificant. What are the reasons behind such differences? What variables are crucial to accounting for these differences? How has Polish society changed in this regard?

Theoretical and empirical analyses show that people in Poland are becoming increasingly active when it comes to sport. In terms of taking part in sport, Polish society is starting to catch up with other European societies. The decisive role in the process is played by: a) social factors (education and affluence), b) the ideals and values that dominate the local culture (physical appearance, kinetic pleasures, and positive emotions), and c) the efficiency and adequacy of the physical education system in schools (innovation, the use of cyberspace, and efforts aimed at addressing social needs). If these three areas of socialization – society, culture and physical education in schools – reach a high level of convergence and if fewer variables hinder the process than at present, people in Poland will become as physically active as other societies in the West.

## KEYWORDS

change, Polish society, participation in sport

## Introduction

Due to its complex and multifaceted nature, sport escapes a clear and synthesizing interpretation. Sport is not a uniform domain of culture; instead, there are many variations of it. Sport plays many different roles the number of which is hard to estimate. For example, some people do sports just for fun and to entertain themselves. In such cases, instead of striving for the best possible performance, priority is to given hedonistic sensations, kinetic sensations, relaxation, the enjoyment of affirmative social interactions, the joy of spending one's free time in a pleasant way, and the opportunity to express oneself. Sport also functions as different games where the main focus is on attaining perfection in terms of physical shape, athletic skills, and ethical criteria. Finally, sport can be seen as a kind of labor aimed at accomplishing pragmatic results, material results in particular. When seen like that, sport comes across as a profession and, consequently, is

subject to all the regularities found in other professions. It becomes a product on the free market where it takes the form of a sporting event. This product is purchased by a vast group of consumers who are usually referred to as supporters. Each sport product has a certain market value that depends on demand (sports discipline, rank of a sporting event) (Krawczyk, 2002, pp. 112-114).

As a result of this multifaceted nature of sport, different theoretical and axiological perspectives need to be adopted while analyzing sport. Sport is an interesting field of research for scholars who deal with life sciences, economic sciences, technical sciences, social sciences, as well as the humanities. For that reason, any attempt at developing a holistic concept of sport presents a number of theoretical and methodological problems because of the fragmented research perspectives offered by the above groups of sciences.

In a bid to circumvent these problems, we shall focus on discussing sport as a socio-cultural phenomenon manifested predominantly in existential and semiotic terms. This paper will primarily deal with universally accessible sport, also called "sport for all," recreational sport. Put more simply: active recreation<sup>1</sup>.

As we analyze contemporary societies, we realize that the extent to which individuals in different societies are involved in sports varies greatly. In some societies, very few people take part in universally accessible sport, while in other societies, physical activity is fundamental to how people spend their free time. In some societies, active forms of physical culture hardly exist in people's lives, whereas for others, physical activity is part and parcel of popular lifestyles (Siciński, 2002, pp. 137-140). The natural question is: What factors trigger discrepancies such as those described above? Or perhaps it is better to ask where different groups of such determinants are located in the world around us. Seeking answers to these questions, we come to the conclusion that the differences could stem from the following three aspects of the socio-cultural environment:

1. The level of social development (affluence, living conditions, economic development, education, social capital, place of residence, legislation, the political and economic systems, and access to sports facilities);
2. The type of culture (system of values, dominant ideals, dominant models of behavior, cultural capital, social awareness, etc.);
3. The social system of the organization of sport, physical education in schools in particular (weekly number of physical education classes, the organization and style of the classes, and the extent to which the needs and expectations of pupils are met).

The three aforementioned groups of factors have a key impact on sport-related social practice. Their social and cultural significance varies, which means their impact varies depending on how well a given culture, society, and physical education system are developed. With this classification in mind, let us try and discuss the Polish public's participation in popular sport, aiming to uncover the reasons behind this state of affairs. We shall use certain regularities which are distinctive to Poland and to those European societies which are better developed and have a longer and stronger tradition with regards to taking part in sport, looking after one's own health, and pursuing active forms of spending free time.

### **Social determinants of universally accessible sport**

People in Poland are a modern society in the final development stage, gravitating towards becoming a post-modern society. That is to say, the Polish public meet criteria which are distinctive to communities of this kind, including mechanized production, growing demand for qualified employees, growing importance of science, declining significance of religion, extensive urbanization, prevalence of rational thinking, and so on. At the same time, societies like these are dominated by consumerism, hedonism, and information technology that pervades all areas of life. Employees in such societies migrate from the production sector to

<sup>1</sup> For more on sport variations see: Kosiewicz, J. (2010). Social and Biological Context of Physical Culture and Sport. *Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research*, vol. L, pp. 21-22. DOI: 10.2478/v10141-010-0021-1

the services sector. Individuals and communities are also exposed to greater risks (Szczepański, 1992). When seen this way, Poland has all the distinctive features of a Western society. And yet, Poland is still different: it once experienced a totalitarian system called socialism; that is, it has gone down a road that no society in the West has ever had to go. For that reason, Poland doesn't have well-developed and well-established cultural models, including models of consuming physical culture. Furthermore, the level of Poland's social development is lower than that of Western societies (Bennett, Savage, & Silva, 2010).

Irrespective of the aforementioned differences, the phenomena and processes that occur in Poland are conducive to changes in the consciousness and attitudes of individuals who comprise Polish society. That is because proven Western lifestyles and models of social resource management are penetrating Polish society. The realization of the necessity to participate in sport is a result of better education, a higher affluence level in statistical terms (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland 2012), and the prevalence of rational thinking. In turn, participation in sport as such is the result of pro-sport attitudes along with improved facilities and financial conditions that allow for sport-related services to be provided.

One extremely important trend that has affected the Polish public's participation in universally accessible sport is that vast groups of blue-collar workers migrating to the white-collar sector. What has been emerging in the process is a new kind of society, described as a post-industrial, information, consumerist, or knowledge-based society (Giddens, 2006, pp. 394-441). In a knowledge-based economy, the majority of people with jobs are not involved in producing and distributing material goods. Instead, they design, work out development strategies, and deal with the marketing, distribution, and provision of services. The result of this is that most of the public is white-collar workers and, quite naturally, they feel an urge to spend their spare time in an active form, which includes participation in sport. At the other extreme is the shrinking group of blue-collar workers who regard passive forms of relaxation, ones that do not require any physical effort whatsoever, as the best way of spending their free time. In other words, changes in the structure of employment stimulate interest and participation in sport (The Participation of Polish People in Sport and Physical Recreation in 2012).

As a result of the social phenomena and processes listed above, a growing portion of the Polish public are becoming increasingly aware of the need to take part in sport. A greater number of people are also involved in sport-related social practice, as evidenced by the findings of empirical studies (The Participation of Polish People in Sport and Physical Recreation in 2012 and other surveys conducted with non-representative samples) as well as everyday observation of social life. One cannot remain oblivious to the great many of Poles who ride bicycles, roller-skate, jog in parks and other green areas, play football on local pitches, carry skiing and surfing equipment on the roofs of their cars, and so on. It is also evident that more and more people have been attending all kinds of picnics, festivals and other sporting and recreational events (CBOS 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013). Good examples of this new situation are numerous running events that have been extremely popular with the public recently. The Warsaw Marathon in 2013 had a record number of around 10,000 participants and a record number of viewers turned up to cheer for the contestants.

None of this means, however, that participation in sport is commonplace in Poland. It definitely is not, nor does it live up to the expectations. Participation in sport is more universal in modern societies found in Europe and beyond. This is particularly true about countries such as Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and so on. That is because those countries are better developed and civilized, or putting it more precisely, people in those countries are more affluent, better educated, and more deeply aware of the need to take part in sport activities. Social life is also better organized in those countries, and the population has better access to sport facilities (Dimitrov, Helmenstein, Kleissner, Moser, & Schindler, 2006).

### **Cultural determinants of universally accessible sport**

Certain elements of culture that prevail in a given society are crucial to accounting for trends that govern participation in universally accessible sport. Such elements include dominant ideals, values, norms,

and behavior patterns which often stem from tradition and customs. The great sport journalist Tomasz Hopfer was the first public figure in Poland to use television and other mass-media means to start extensive efforts aimed at promoting jogging and running among Poles. In Hopfer's days, a majority of the public regarded jogging as something unreasonably extravagant, a whim and failure to conform to a fixed cultural order. Sometimes jogging was even treated as a deviation. Joggers were sometimes mocked and insulted and shown gestures with a clearly disapproving and scornful meaning. Those who treated joggers like "freaks" went even as far as to set dogs on them<sup>2</sup>.

Polish society is distinctive for its strong attachment to the traditional system of Catholic norms and values, where the faithful are encouraged to cultivate spiritual and intellectual values at the expense of physical development, fitness, and health. This tradition is barely present anymore in the teachings of the Church as such, but it is still there in the consciousness and attitudes of a considerable part of Catholics, especially those with poor educations and those who live in rural areas. The problem is that many members of the Church hierarchy and many lay Catholics refuse to open their minds to modern teachings that follow the Second Vatican Council (Second Vatican Council: 1962-65), especially the teachings of John Paul II who laid the theological and philosophical foundations for the modern, Catholic concept of sport (Dziubiński, 2008, pp. 143-200).

Culture in Poland, including physical culture, has been going through changes on many levels, but the process is not as fast-paced as could be expected. Over the past decade, significant changes have taken place in terms of how the values of physical culture are accepted by the public. In the past, in the days of Józef Piłsudski and then under the socialist rule, Poland attributed fundamental importance to utilitarian values. The primary objective was to prepare citizens for becoming reliable workers and defenders of the country. When it comes to work, fitness nowadays is no longer as important as it used to be, as physical labor only constitutes a fraction of Polish people's professional activity. The defense capabilities of Poland, in turn, do not depend solely on the physical shape of soldiers, but on access to cutting-edge information technology and competence in using the technology during conflicts (Dziubiński, 2013a).

Empirical studies show that contemporary Poles are fond of aesthetic, hedonistic, and agonistic values (Urych, 2010) and are keen to pursue the values by engaging in sporting activity. They want to make sure that their bodies look good and conform to the latest aesthetic trends, they seek pleasure in being physically active, and they like to experience positive emotions that are bound with sporting competition.

Contemporary participants in sport feel an urge to seek extreme excitement in sport, which, accordingly, is provided by sports referred to as "extreme" or "adrenaline-driven." People who do such sports like to say "no risk, no fun," but this is not some arbitrary risk in cultural terms, as these people expose themselves to real risks. To them, climbing a cliff with protection is pleasant, but the real fun is to climb without any protection equipment such that the slightest wrong move could cause the climber to fall off the cliff and die. The craving for extreme risk and the constant pursuit of new and more powerful sensations, which, according to participants in extreme sports, are also more pleasant, is a distinctive feature of post-modern societies. Such societies are founded on sophisticated consumption that can never be satisfied and on an endless quest for escalating excitement. "The post-modern body," Zygmunt Bauman writes,

*"is first of all a recipient of sensations. It consumes sensations and digests them."*

He continues:

*"When fitness is so defined, then to keep the body fit is to feel excited at the sight of stimuli and feel happy about consuming them. Physical fitness is less about the feats that the body can accomplish than it is about the profundity of sensations experienced as the feats are being*

<sup>2</sup> Polish Football Association (PZPN) president Michał Listkiewicz said during a televised press conference (Orange Sport channel) that in the past, people who jogged to stay in shape had been treated as "freaks" by a large part of the public.

*accomplished. It is all about the sensations and these should be fascinating, astonishing, enthralling and rapturous*" (1995, pp. 90-91).

Similar trends are also found in societies which are better developed than Poland's society, but in those countries many more people pursue such values in comparison to Poland. Those societies have had a longer tradition of cultivating sporting values. They have long been dominated by rational ideals that attribute a high significance to attractive physical appearance, kinetic pleasures, and positive emotions. All of these have been deeply rooted in the consciousness and attitudes of citizens in those countries, more so than in Poland, and for a longer time (Dziubiński, 2013a).

In a way, the organization of culture in Western societies forces the public to take part in sport, because those who are not involved in any sport encounter informal negative sanctions from society, such as bewilderment, derision, cutting remarks, and so on. In other words, participation in sport is a cultural norm, whereas failure to participate is regarded as a divergence from the norm and fixed order, or even as a deviation. In Poland, culture does not have such a pro-sport effect, and participants in sport are hardly ever gratified with even symbolic rewards such as respect, recognition, and social prestige. Sport consumption in Poland has neither the power to elevate people's value nor does it signify affiliation with upper social classes (Dziubiński, 2013b, pp. 27-47). Even when it occasionally does, the effect is far weaker than in Western societies.

### **Educational determinants of universally accessible sport**

Physical education constitutes an important part of the process during which society prepares for taking part in universally accessible sport (socialization). Pupils and students attend physical education classes at each stage of education from primary to university-level schools. Efforts are being made in Poland to reform the system of physical education so it addresses the needs and interests of children and encourages them to pursue sporting values after they reach adulthood<sup>3</sup>. In statistical terms, physical education in Poland is highly inefficient for both objective and subjective reasons. On the one hand, physical education fails to produce satisfactory effects, as it clashes with the impact of pupils' social environment, especially families (as shown by frequent and groundless notes from parents who excuse their children from attending physical education classes). The environment also lacks a "cultural atmosphere" to create a socializing effect. On the other hand, there are conservative teachers who resent change, innovation, and the use of new technology in physical education (Information on Audit Results. Physical Education and Sport 2010).

One of the faults of physical education in Polish schools is that the system lags behind changes that have been taking place in society and culture. For example, in many cases physical education classes are conducted as if to prepare children for living in a pre-modern society, or an early modern one, that is, children are taught to pursue utilitarian goals. Instead, they should be educated towards becoming consumers of physical culture and towards creating physical culture to suit their individual needs and capabilities seen in a modern society. In the case of most members of a modern society, "there is no demand for the biceps for workers and soldiers," for bodies subjected to exercise and strict discipline. Instead, the demand is for bodies that are fit in terms of being ready to receive sensual stimuli, to feel delight and unforgettable sensations bound with physical and other activities, and to take pleasure in culinary and sexual experiences (Bejin, 1985, p. 211).

Schools in Western countries provide fewer hours of physical education than in Poland, but children and adolescents who go to school are equipped with a higher social and cultural capital, and that also applies to sporting activities. They acquire the capital in the process of primary socialization, through enculturation by family members (mothers, fathers, and older siblings) who are good role models as far as physical culture is concerned. Physical education in schools is compatible with socialization into participation in sport within

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<sup>3</sup> This trend is reflected in the new physical education curriculum. Order of the Minister of Education of 23 December 2008, Journal of Laws no. 4 item 17.



families and wider social groups. Schools in Europe carry out a wider variety of programs that address the needs of the public, including civilized participation in sporting spectacles, healthy eating habits, and health care involving physical activity (Pośpiech, 2006).

Regardless of the above, physical education in Polish schools is changing in the desired direction; however, the process is too slow and encounters many obstacles. The main hindrance is that schools fail to use the advantage presented by extra-curricular activities. Activities like those should be tailored to what pupils need and expect in terms of both form and content. Pupils, alone and with their parents, are the ones who choose those activities that – free from symbolic obligations and uncompromising imposition – help them to pursue their sport-related interests and passions (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2010).

Conducted on all levels, the reforms of physical education in Poland are slowly but surely starting to bring the desired effect. The main reason behind this are transformations, which have occurred in the social and cultural environment, an environment which in a way supports the entire process and provides a fertile ground for pro-sport attitudes among pupils. It also fosters acceptance for the desired models of physical activity and then allows for these to be put into action (The Participation of Poles in Sports and Physical Recreation in 2012).

It is also worth mentioning the role which legislation pertaining to sport plays in Poland. When the Law on Sport (Law of 25 June 2010 on Sport) entered into force to replace the Law on Physical Culture from 1996 (Law of 18 January 1996 on Physical Culture), many professed the decline of physical culture among the Polish public. But something else happened. We now know that not even the best legislation can encourage the public to become more physically active nor can the worst legislation discourage them from pursuing physical activity. Rather than laws, it is the social and cultural factors that have a decisive impact on participation in universally accessible sport. The emergence of the civil society that is happening before our eyes is also reflected in the area of universally accessible sport.

## Conclusions

In summary, it has to be said that Polish society is becoming increasingly active when it comes to different sports. This is a slow but systematic process, just like many other evolutionary social processes. To a large extent, the pace at which Poland has been approaching European standards in this department depends on social factors (education and affluence), the ideals and values which dominate the local culture (physical appearance, kinetic pleasures, and positive emotions), and the efficiency and adequacy of the physical education system in schools (innovation, the use of cyberspace, and efforts aimed at addressing social needs). If these three areas of socialization (society, culture, and physical education in schools) reach a high level of convergence, and if fewer variables hinder the process than at present, then people in Poland will become as physically active as other societies in the West.

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**AUTHOR'S ADDRESS:**

Zbigniew Dziubiński  
 Josef Piłsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw  
 34 Marymoncka  
 00-968 Warsaw, Poland  
 Email: zdziubinski@wp.pl

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#### c. Journal article from an online database

**Format:** Author(s). (Year of publication). Article title [Electronic version]. *Journal Title*. *Volume* (issue), range of pages. Retrieved date of access, from name of database. DOI.

**Example:** Czajgucki Z., Zimecki M., & Andruszkiewicz R. (2006, December). The immunoregulatory effects of edeine analogues in mice [Abstract]. *Cell. Mol. Biol. Lett.*, 12(3), 149-161. Retrieved December 6, 2006, from PubMed database on the World Wide Web: <http://www.pubmed.gov>. DOI: 10.2478/s11658-006-0061-z.

#### d. Newspaper article (no author)

**Format:** Article title. (Publication date). *Journal Title*. page.

**Example:** Amazing Amazon region. (1989, January 12). *New York Times*, p. D11.

#### e. Encyclopedia article

**Format:** Author. (Year of publication). Article title. In *Encyclopedia title* (volume number, pages). Place of publication: Encyclopedia name.

**Example:** Bergmann, P.G. (1993). Relativity. In *The new encyclopedia britannica* (Vol. 26, pp. 501-508). Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.

### C. Other formats

#### a. Web page

**Format:** Author/Sponsor. (last update or copyright date). *Title*. Retrieved date of access, from URL.

**Example:** Walker, J. (1996, August). *APA-style citations of electronic resources*. Retrieved November 21, 2001, from <http://www.cas.usf.edu/english/walker/apa.html>

#### b. Lecture note

**Format:** Author(s). (Date of presentation). *Lecture title*. Lecture notes distributed in the unit, at the name of the teaching organisation, the location.

**Example:** Liffers, M. (2006, August 30). *Finding information in the library*. Lecture notes distributed in the unit Functional Anatomy and Sports Performance 1102, University of Western Australia, Crawley, Western Australia.

#### c. Patent

**Format:** Author. (Year). Patent number. The location. Issue body.

**Example:** Smith, I.M. (1988). U.S. Patent No. 123,445. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

#### **d. Standard**

**Format:** Issue body. (Year). Standard name. Standard number. The location.

**Example:** Standards Association of Australia. (1997). Australian standard: Pressure equipment manufacture. AS4458-1997. North Sydney.

#### **e. Video**

**Format:** Producer, P.P. (Producer), & Director, D.D. (Director). (Date of publication). Title of motion picture [Motion picture]. Country of origin: Studio or distributor.

**Example:** Zhang, Y. (Producer/Director). (2000). Not one less [Motion Picture]. China: Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.

#### **f. Audio recording**

**Format:** Songwriter, W.W. (Date of copyright). Title of song [Recorded by artist if different from song writer]. On Title of album [Medium of recording]. Location: Label. (Recording date if different from copyright date).

**Example:** Taupin, B. (1975). Someone saved my life tonight [Recorded by Elton John]. On Captain fantastic and the brown dirt cowboy [CD]. London: Big Pig Music Limited.

#### **g. Mailing list**

**Format:** Author. (Exact date of posting). Subject line of message. Message posted to followed by name of mailing list, archived at followed by address for the archived version of the message

**Example:** Hammond, T. (2000, November 20). YAHC: Handle Parameters, DOI Genres, etc. Message posted to Ref-Links electronic mailing list, archived at <http://www.doi.org/mail-archive/ref-link/msg00088.html>

#### **h. Computer software**

**Format:** Author(s). (Year). Title [computer software]. The location: Company.

**Example:** Ludwig, T. (2002). PsychInquiry [computer software]. New York: Worth.

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**Prof. Dr. Jerzy Kosiewicz, D.h.c.**

**Josef Pilsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland**

**Department of Philosophy and Sociology**

**00-968 Warsaw, 34 Marymoncka Street**

Jerzy Kosiewicz

Adrian Dobrzycki