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SYLWIA TOCZEK-WERNER, MARIUSZ SOŁTYSIK
University School of Physical Education in Wrocław, Poland

PARTICIPATION OF POLES IN OUTDOOR SPORTS ACTIVITIES IN VIEW OF AGE DIVERSIFICATION

Key words: sports activity, natural environment, preferences, motivation.

ABSTRACT

The article concentrates on outdoor sports activities undertaken voluntarily by Poles during leisure time. On the basis of a local study carried out on a sample of 728 individuals, data were collected on factors and trends of participation in different outdoor sports activities and on age diversification of the participants. Personal interviews were used to collect data on sports activities practiced in the summer time in three selected geographical areas of Poland, each with a different type of natural environment: seaside, lakeside and mountains. The obtained results reflect patterns of Poles' participation in different outdoor sports activities and indicate their dominant preferences and motivations.

INTRODUCTION

Progress in science and technology causes rapid changes in people's lifestyles, self-perception and problem management. Activity, development, commitment are subjects present today in the center of human interest. They direct human behavior towards attainment of such values as well-being and self-fulfillment.

There is no doubt that the mentioned rapidity of changes concerns not only people's attitude towards work, but also their perception of leisure time and its organization [11]. It is believed that modern man is becoming more and more competent, not only in professional activities. Similarly, in the field of leisure, people are starting to consciously search for selective offers and adequate services rendered in extraordinarily complex and globally dependent conditions.

Signs of a shift in human values, needs and desires, as a general trend in contemporary physical

culture, can be found in the physically active usage of the natural environment. The most recent trends in research on types of sports experience confirm the special meaning of those areas that offer people the best conditions of development of physical fitness and human body recovery. These areas provide conditions for activities ensuring direct contact with nature. Spending time in ecosystems closely emulating the natural environment, characterized by clean air, water and soil, silence, and wealth of fauna and flora species, has beneficial effects on one's renewal of physical strength and psychical state [4, 6, 7].

The dominant factors affecting the development of sports activities in contact with nature are conditions of living in a crowded environment of complex interpersonal relationships and human variety, causing on the one hand the need to privacy and physical isolation from the excess of external factors; and on the other hand, the need to seek stimulation to explore unusual

places and participate in risky forms of physical activity.

A rational use of the natural environment, involving both soothing and stimulating natural factors, depends on possessing certain skills. Acquiring skills to use such valuable means, however, demands considerable knowledge of theoretical and practical foundations of human activity and the natural environment. Nowadays, skills of accumulating and organizing such knowledge are not enough though. It is important that individual components of human activity and elements constituting outdoor sports activities are properly valued. This will ensure the possibility to assess the adequacy of the applied means, from the point of view of their usefulness for the human body and the surrounding environment.

The criteria for assessment of acquired skills and the resultant decision-making processes include, among others, felt emotions. If a physical activity undertaken in a certain environment evokes positive emotions in an individual, such as pleasure and curiosity, both this activity and its surrounding environment become valuable for this individual. One condition must, however, exist: the activity and its venue have to adequately planned and organized in line with the individual's expectations. Only activities undertaken in such conditions can be accompanied by such important feelings as satisfaction and contentment.

Research studies on the dominant sources of satisfaction and preference models concerning forms and places of sports activity point to the growing significance of the natural environment. This growth has a complex character and should be studied from different standpoints: nature as an inner factor ("I" of a human being), nature as a scenery and space for sensory perception, and nature as an environment for activeness [16]. In each case nature is one of the elements of the relationship with the human body, necessary for its existence not only in the objective sense, e.g. for biochemical processes, but also in the subjective sense – for one's well-being. The results of empirical research show that the level of satisfaction of an individual practicing an outdoor sports activity derives both from pleasure with contact with nature and from tiredness and pressure connected with the choice of an often boring, difficult and emotionally stressing form of activity [5, 10, 12, 14].

Spending time in the natural environment, which is related to the feeling of external freedom, gives people a possibility of satisfactory creative action, especially those with favorable traits of character, intellect and personality. For them nature has a special meaning – it inspires, excites and stimulates. Very often the features of elements of nature are not so important here – much more significant is the possibility of self fulfillment.

Human choices of forms of outdoor sports activity and places of their realization are more and more strongly determined by the perception of the opportunity of gaining different kinds of experience. Thus not only the "content" and affluence of the environment counts in these choices, but also its level of organization.

In considering the role and meaning of the relationship between the individual and nature, two interesting issues should be emphasized. One is the growing interest in choosing wild, secluded places as activity venues; the other – choosing risky forms of activity. In the past "wild" outdoor places were perceived in a negative way as neglected, abandoned, dangerous and to be avoided. Nowadays people tend to think positively about such places with care and respect as valuable and deserving conservation for future generations. Such areas are perceived as precious, because they give people the possibility of extraordinary activities helpful in development of self-confidence through coping with physical challenges, becoming self-sufficient and acquiring certain skills.

Many representatives of environmental psychology point at the personal advantages resulting from contact with wild areas [3, 9, 8]. These include advantages connected with the possibility of self-assessment improvement or obtaining some new skills; self-control of emotions; testing one's self-sufficiency by seeking challenges and adventures; experiencing family and friendship solidarity and closeness; and receiving esthetic and spiritual impressions in contact with nature. One must not forget the educational significance of such encounters allowing learning and exploring, and their symbolic value, i.e. the sense we attribute to the protection of these areas for future generations [1, 8].

With regard to the choice of risky sports activities, including those exposing individuals to real and imagined dangers typical for the given natural environment (e.g. mountain climbing, water sports, gliding) the following question can be

posed: Why do people get involved in such activities and take up risky behavior defined as seeking extreme emotions and stress? This phenomenon has been subject to research concerning the sense of competence as a result of acquiring and experiencing peculiar skills in conditions of risk and danger [2, 10]. One study of mountain climbers revealed six motives for taking such an activity: need of approval, opportunity of experiencing a wild environment and being closer to nature, gaining problem solving skills, gaining competence, and possibility of relaxation and leadership. It has also been established that individuals who use natural areas during emotionally stressing forms of activity are motivated by the chances of facing and successfully fulfilling extraordinary demands and challenges and solving difficult problems.

METHODS

The study sample consisted of 728 vacationers who were asked to fill out an interview questionnaire concerning their participation in different forms of outdoor sports activities, factors influencing their choice of activities and age diversification. The list of activities included summer time activities undertaken in three distinct geographical areas of Poland: seaside, lakes and mountains.

A person at the age of minimum 15 years of age was assumed to be the basic research unit. The method of purposive sampling was used in the selection of research units. Only those who declared active, voluntary involvement in freely chosen sports activities were taken into account. Answers to four questions were taken into consideration:

- What forms of outdoor sports activities are most often chosen by the Poles?
- Does age influence those choices?
- What are the Poles' reasons for undertaking sports activities in the natural environment?
- What values do they search in such activities and which activities do they regard as most important?

Table 1. Outdoor sports activities undertaken by the Poles

Sports activities	Sports activities
Running, jogging	Paintball
Golf, mini-golf	Football, volleyball, basketball
Tennis	Skiing and skating
Softball	Free ride and ski alpinism
Mountain biking	Snowboarding
Horse riding	Survival
Hiking	Canyoning
Cross-country and orientation running	Fishing
Mountain climbing	Lake and mountain canoeing
Rock climbing	Rafting
Kitesurfing	Sailing
Windsurfing	Diving
Swimming in open waters	Bungee jumping
Games in water, water jumping	Hang gliding
Cave penetration	Gliding, balloon flying
Shooting with a bow, cross bow	Parachuting
Hunting	Nordic Walking
Sports fishing	Quads and motocross
Zorbing	Ski running

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the most common outdoor sports activities in three vacation areas under study. 38 types of behavior were distinguished directly or indirectly concerning the natural environment. This is merely less than a half of patterns of behavior of a similar character in the world [7].

The collected data allow definition of the forms of sports activity in the three geographical areas and estimation of frequency of participation in them expressed in absolute numbers. The data also reveal differences in sports preferences between the particular areas, resulting from their different character, specific possibilities for participants and limitations. The situation is similar in the case of participants' age. Table 3 presents the diversification of choices of activities on the basis of age.

Table 4 shows factors affecting the subjects' interest and participation in given forms of sports

activities as well as the significance each participant attaches to each of these forms. These factors are motives triggering most likely the entire the process of participants' involvement in different sports.

The information obtained through the questionnaire confirms the hypothesis about

multiple directions of sports choices concerning both the forms and places of sports activities, regardless of the type of vacation area.

The different significances attached to the motives in Table 4, with regard to subjects' age are not surprising. The general knowledge of human behavior explains this diversity through the

Table 2. Participation in sports activities depending on the type of landscape

Sports activity	% of participants			
	Total	Seaside	Lakes	Mountains
Bike trips	42.3	50.2	43.3	33.0
Hiking	34.5	25.1	21.0	57.7
Long distance walks	18.3	15.5	22.7	16.7
Tennis	12.4	11.5	13.8	11.7
Canoeing, boating, water biking	12.2	12.3	24.3	–
Volleyball	11.5	6.4	10.1	18.4
Cricket, ringo, badminton	10.8	10.3	10.1	12.1
Swimming in outdoor swimming pools	10.7	7.6	15.1	9.6
Fishing	10.4	11.1	18.1	2.1
Nordic walking	9.3	7.9	7.1	13.0
ATVs and motocross	8.5	8.3	9.2	8.0
Shooting	7.7	22.3	–	–
Survival	7.7	6.4	8.0	8.8
Basketball	7.5	11.5	7.1	3.8
Car trips	6.6	6.8	4.6	8.4
Windsurfing	6.2	5.6	13.0	–
Football	5.9	7.6	8.8	1.2
Skateboarding, roller-skating	5.3	5.2	8.0	2.9
Sailing	5.1	4.4	10.9	–
Paintball	4.5	2.8	1.7	9.2
Horse riding	4.0	4.8	2.5	4.6
Bungee jumping	4.0	7.2	–	4.6
General physical exercises	3.8	4.8	3.8	2.9
Jogging	3.6	3.2	5.0	2.5
Scooter, motorcycle riding	3.6	6.8	3.8	–
Bicycle racing	3.3	2.0	1.3	1.7
Mountain, rock climbing, climbing artificial walls	3.1	2.0	–	7.5
Water trips with camping	1.8	–	5.5	–
Water skiing	1.8	2.4	2.9	–
Open water swimming	1.5	2.8	1.7	–
Cross-country and orientation running	1.4	1.2	1.7	1.2
Hunting	1.2	–	2.9	0.8
Fishing	1.2	3.4	–	–
Hang gliding	1.1	0.8	–	2.5
Free diving	1.0	1.2	1.7	–
Golf	0.7	2.0	–	–
Gliding	0.4	–	0.4	0.8
Cave penetration	0.3	–	–	0.8

Table 3. Participation in sports activities depending on participants' age

Sports activity	% of participants (age in years)				
	Total	15-24 years	25-44 years	45-64 years	65 + years
Bike trips	42.3	67.1	46.0	16.0	10.0
Hiking	34.5	27.2	33.1	26.0	19.7
Long distance walks	18.3	15.1	9.7	22.9	6.7
Tennis	12.4	27.5	14.8	7.2	2.0
Canoeing, boating, water biking	12.2	26.6	14.9	3.0	–
Volleyball	11.5	15.4	37.0	4.8	–
Cricket, ringo, badminton	10.8	10.3	35.6	10.1	12.1
Swimming in outdoor swimming pools	10.7	48.9	35.6	31.0	19.2
Fishing	10.4	15.0	30.0	45.8	27.2
Nordic walking	9.3	0.9	23.8	17.1	3.0
ATVs and motocross	8.5	55.3	15.7	0.2	–
Shooting	7.7	12.3	12.4	–	–
Survival	7.7	24.4	15.0	2.1	–
Basketball	7.5	19.5	21.7	2.2	0.8
Car trips	6.6	2.8	41.4	16.6	1.4
Windsurfing	6.2	15.6	11.0	0.2	–
Football	5.9	17.0	5.8	–	–
Skateboarding, roller-skating	5.3	17.6	0.8	–	–
Sailing	5.1	8.2	28.2	0.6	–
Paintball	4.5	7.4	6.6	1.0	–
Horse riding	4.0	19.7	20.0	1.6	0.9
Bungee jumping	4.0	7.8	1.1	–	4.6
General physical exercises	3.8	2.2	2.5	8.1	2.0
Jogging	3.6	14.4	14.9	3.0	–
Scooter, motorcycle riding	3.6	6.8	4.4	1.8	–
Bicycle racing	3.3	34.3	19.8	1.1	1.0
Mountain, rock climbing, climbing artificial walls	3.1	27.2	31.6	–	–
Water trips with camping	1.8	–	12.3	1.5	–
Water skiing	1.8	3.4	5.4	0.2	–
Open water swimming	1.5	2.8	13.8	1.7	–
Cross-country and orientation running,	1.4	11.2	3.0	1.7	1.2
Hunting	1.2	–	7.8	21.0	–
Sport fishing	1.2	3.4	13.0	23.0	1.0
Hang gliding	1.1	16.8	16.8	–	–
Free diving	1.0	8.2	10.0	1.0	–
Golf	0.7	1.0	2.3	5.9	1.0
Gliding	0.4	–	4.4	0.4	–
Cave penetration	0.3	8.1	17.5	1.5	–

complexity of these motives resulting from the cognitive-active nature of temporal relations in human life and decisions concerning human behavior. The entirety of such relations constitutes human experience which changes during lifetime modifying the learnt activities (also recreational

activities) and favoring learning new ones [13]. The role of the mechanism responsible for behavior organization is fulfilled here by motivation being a system of specific needs and values determining the direction and degree of involvement of an individual.

Table 4. Factors influencing interest and participation in outdoor sports activities and assessment of their importance depending on participants' age

Factors	Importance depending on participants' age			
	15-24 years	25-44 years	45-64 years	65+ years
Being closer to nature, opportunity of experiencing it	**	***	***	***
Regeneration of physical and psychical strength	*	**	***	***
Maintaining good shape	*	**	***	**
Retreat from everyday duties	**	*	**	*
Developing family bonds	*	**	***	*
Demonstrating skills and possibilities	***	***	**	**
Change, experiencing something new	***	*	**	***

***most important, **very important, *fairly important

Table 5. Values sought in outdoor sports activities and assessment of their importance depending on participants' age

Values	Importance depending on participants' age			
	15-24 years	25-44 years	45-64 years	65+ years
Emotional (contentment, friendship, satisfaction, admiration of beauty, love, satisfaction of ambition, prestige)	***	**	**	***
Intellectual (curiosity, activeness, creative life)	**	**	**	**
Spiritual (self-esteem, being useful, bravery, freedom, peace, responsibility, independence)	*	*	***	***
Physical (beauty, physical vitality, fitness, health and well-being)	***	***	*	*

***most important, **very important, *fairly important

The analysis of values sought by the subjects in outdoor sports activities shows what kinds of biological needs can be fulfilled in such activities (Tab. 5). The collected data reveal a certain scale of importance of what probably occurs in their consciousness while certain sports preferences are formed. The subjects' opinions on this topic are presented, in regard to their age. The data from Table 5 show, on the one hand, the variety of aims and desires connected with outdoor sports activities and, on the other hand, their social diversification. There may be a number of factors affecting the arrangement of studied values, e.g. a subject's education level. Such dependence was described in one of earlier publications on this topic [15].

DISCUSSION

The presented approach towards research on interaction between a specific human activity such as sport and the natural environment originates from the human cognitive concept. It assumes that a human being is an independent entity which usually acts consciously and deliberately in increasingly complex situations of the external environment. During lifetime people accept, store, interpret, create and pass on information (knowledge) and assign certain meanings to it. Thanks to the competence of the human mind an individual can perceive reality and remember, analyze and estimate the received data. As "perpetrators" people take up deliberate actions and control them.

Information about the surroundings, personal "I", and program of a sports action which enable an individual to reach a given goal is encoded in the

cognitive structures. These structures consist of both opinions about the natural environment and its components as well as about the individual: character, intellect, health, psychological condition and physical fitness.

The noted interactions between the human being and the environment chosen for sports activities could probably be better understood by focusing on the way in which people experience and interpret this environment, taking into account distinguishing features of humans in nature and treating human actions in this environment as reactions to the meanings assigned to it. The significant human features include creativity, inventiveness, individualism and human values. Regarding the necessity of observing them while seeking correlations between human activity and the environment, the commonly applied research techniques seem to be inappropriate. They ought to be replaced by research techniques focusing more on people's values and experiences of the environment. They can be methodologically classified as participating observation, discreet measurement and different forms of deepened interviews. With the aid of such techniques the meanings assigned to the environment by individuals or groups of people can be thoroughly explored.

The presented indications are aimed to encourage further analysis of some main trends in outdoor sports activities and their complex considerations, which appear to have an impact both on people and the natural environment.

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