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# **Social aspects of running events participation in rural areas – the impact on health and physical activity**

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## **Abstract**

**Introduction:** The main purpose of the research is to determine the impact of the organization of running events in rural areas on promoting health and undertaking physical activity.

**Material and methods:** In order to elicit the opinions of the participants of the marathon on the popularization of running, health and physical activity, a diagnostic survey was carried out during "Run of the Lion", where 312 participants of the race (both passive and active) were examined.

**Results:** Examined participants of the race, where as much as 86% of the 312 respondents believe that the marathon and all the attractions associated with the event have an impact on the popularization of healthy lifestyles, both among the residents and passive spectators.

**Conclusions:** The trends observed in the Polish society lead to the reflection about the motives that guide people involved in running the marathon. In the context of everyday life both trainings and running marathons itself require a lot of free time. Sports events in the modern world play the role of promoting health and physical activity also among the fans.

**Key words:** health promotion, health, physical activity, running, rural areas

## **Introduction**

Research into the influence of the organization (broadly) of sporting events or in the narrow approach and of running events on various aspects of life of the participants was carried out by many researchers. For example, Hover et al. (2006) analyzed the creation of the social impact of sports events (environmental, economic, social indicators of undertaken physical activity), proving that it is very significant and generally positive. Van Bottenburg (2009) states that the social impact generated by participation in universal sport is visible to the naked eye, however, it is difficult to investigate it clearly and unambiguously, to count and to prove (as cited: „Easy to see, but hard to prove.”). Many authors who prove how positive is the impact of the participation in "universal sport", also select specific factors. For example, Biddle (2006) examines the impact of sport on the psychosocial condition, Maier (2008) divides the impact of sport on people according to gender, just as in the Polish scientific environment Waśkowski (2014) studied the motives, preferences and expectations of women towards running, and Stępień (2014) analyzed the experience of women's participation in the marathon and made an attempt to determine the importance of the participation in marathon races and the role of running as a leisure time activity in their lives. Coakley (1993) for a long time has combined participation in sport with a positive impact on the process of socialization. Bauman et al. already in 2009 described the positive results of the research into the role of creating community programs based on the organization of mass sporting events which influence undertaking physical activity by patients. Nowak and Supiński (2004) presented the results of studies on the impact of training and participation in marathon runs on the health of the participants, which

show that despite numerous injuries resulting from overloads caused by exhausting workouts or competition, runners in the vast majority consider this form of physical activity to be healthy. Sato et al. (2016) prove that participation in running events has a direct impact on the sense of life satisfaction and combine it with loyalty to the organized running events, the psychological aspect of co-participation and with the influence of preparations for the event on health and well-being. However, the main theoretical approaches to study the motivation for undertaking sport and identifying their specific features are the strong point of methods based on specific psychological theories as well as methods based on the concept of "achievement motivation" and the concept of doing sport as a "positive addiction" (Masters, Ogles, Jolton 1977; Sankowski 2001). In the Western countries, research into motivation for running and participation in running events, mainly in the marathons, has been carried out for over thirty years. For example, Curtis and McTeer (1981) used a sentence completion method, questioning 740 marathon runners. On the basis of received responses they compiled categories and found that the main reasons include: achievement of objectives, the impact of others and mental well-being. Summers et al. (1982, 1983) also using the method of sentence completion, examined three reasons for participation in marathons. Once they determined the incidence and combined them into categories based on content similarity, it turned out that the most frequently mentioned were achievement of objectives and self-esteem test, as well as physical fitness and the impact of others. Johnsgård (1985), using the questionnaire method, examined the readers of a monthly magazine devoted to running. The examined group as the main reasons for running gave physical fitness, mood control and self-image. Clough et al. (1989) also inquired the

marathon runners about the reasons for running and using factor analysis they identified six factors according to the level of influence: the challenge, physical shape / health, well-being, social factors, status and addiction. Many authors have examined particular factors using proprietary tools. For example Gill and Deeter (1988) applied Sport Orientation Questionnaire (SoQ), measuring achievement orientation in sport, Crowne and Marlow (1960) created a questionnaire Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSd), which is the scale of seeking social approval, and Carmack and Martens (1979) used Attentional Focus Questionnaire (AFQ), which measures associative/dissociative attentional focus in sport. Masters et al. (1993) began to develop a questionnaire The Motivations of Marathoners Scales (MoMS), to measure motivation for marathon running. The work on it was divided into two stages. The first one consisted of the pilot studies, modification of the position and evaluation of the reliability of the scales, and the other one dealt with the accuracy of the tool. In the first stage, analyzing the results of previous studies due to the content, the authors of the scale found that we can talk about four general and nine specific groups of reasons for running: physical (general health orientation and weight concern), psychological (psychological coping, self-esteem and the meaning of life), social (affiliation and recognition) and related to achievements (competition and achieving personal goals). According to the authors of the questionnaire, the study of the qualitative aspect of motivation of marathon runners for running marathons is the first step to explore the diversity of motives for running (Masters, Ogles, Jolton, 1993). The research of Masters and coauthors showed satisfactory psychometric indicators, defining the reliability and accuracy of the questionnaire, as well as the adequacy of the model. So far the MoMS scale has been used

in many studies, for example the ones (Sankowski 2001) exploring motivation of marathon runners for running marathons due to the level of experience (Masters, Ogles, 1995), gender (Ogles, Masters, Richardson, 1995), cognitive strategy (Masters, Lambert, 1998; Masters, Ogles, 1998) and age (Ogles, Masters, 2000). Using the scale, on the basis of cluster analysis, the types of marathon runners in the American population were also distinguished (Ogles, Masters, 2003). They differed in both the intensity of different motives for running and demographic and training variables. The MoMS scale was also used for measurement of the motives of ultramarathon runners (Van der Nest, access date: 29.05.2012) for running, and it was also adapted in Spain (Ruiz, Sanchoo, 2011). Polish researcher M. Dybała (2013) attempted to adapt this tool to the Polish conditions where it was used never before, considering it to be the most professional in psychometric and conceptual terms. Having completed a series of works, Dybała (2013) adapted the Motivations of Marathoners Scales (MOMS) tool to Polish conditions. The final version of the Polish adaptation of the instrument was made up of nine scales: general health orientation, weight concern, affiliation, recognition, competition, achievement of personal goals, psychological coping, self-esteem, meaning of life. The questionnaire was shortened mainly in the area of psychological motives.

Popularization of running in Poland encourages the study not only on the motives for participation but also on the impact of the organization of running events on health promotion, undertaking physical activity and changes in people's lifestyles. An example is running a marathon on a massive scale. The number of both organized events in this distance and the players taking part in them has begun to grow since about 2000. The

increasing number of participants in the largest of them is impressive because from 2000 to 2016 the number of participants in such events has increased, e.g. in Warsaw from 587 to 5924, in Poznan from 761 to 5904, in Wroclaw from 464 to 4212. In Krakow in the first edition of the marathon in 2002 competed 718 runners, while in 2016 the number grew to 5548. The trends observed in the Polish society lead to the reflection about the motives that guide people involved in running the marathon and half marathon. However, the dynamic growth of the organization of sports events "for everyone", which meets with a positive reception of society, is also the result of other factors: searching for strong impressions and emotions provided by sport competition, searching for the possibility of establishing bonds and social relations, searching for a sense of community during events in the era of the development of a society of individualism.

### **Material and methods**

The observed upward trend in people taking up running as a systematic sports and recreation activity is associated with a continuously growing number of mass running events organized all over the world, also in Poland, even in small localities, in village areas, making the local communities aware of the necessity to move and affecting the changes in thinking about physical culture. The main objective of the research is to study and explain the social motives of participation in mass running events, and to determine the impact of the organization of these events on promoting health and undertaking physical activity by Polish people.

Research carried out during the Run of the Lion (Bieg Lwa) in Tarnowo Podgórze in Poland, account for the example of popularizing active lifestyle by organizing running events at a local scale. „Run of the Lion”

has been organized each May since 2012 in the area of Tarnowo Podgórne commune, located in Wielkopolskie voivodship, 22 km north from Poznan.

The offer of the event includes:

- „Run of the Lion” i.e. half marathon at the distance of 21 km,
- „Lion Chase” – distance of 7 km, participants begin the run together with half marathon runners,
- „Run of the Lion Cubs” – distance depends on the age of a child participating (from 100 meters to 2 kilometers),
- school relay – half marathon,
- outdoor cycling – bicycles for spinning arranged along the running route, where people „cycling” on stationary bikes practice together with the participants.

In order to elicit the opinions of the participants of the marathon held in Tarnowo Podgorne on the popularization of running, health and physical activity and tourism, a diagnostic survey was carried out during "Run of the Lion", on 18 May 2014, where 312 participants of the race (both passive and active) were examined.

## **Results**

Analysis of half marathon statistics carried out by the organizers of the race shows a growing interest in the event among runners (<http://www.bieglwa.pl/> (access 26.09.2014):

- in 2012 participated 760 competitors, also foreigners (1 Kenia, 1 Belgium, 1 Holland),
- in 2013 - 1002 (+32 %) competitors (3 Kenia, 1 Ukraine),
- in 2014 – 1068 competitors (2 Kenia, 1 Ukraine, 3 Luxemburg),

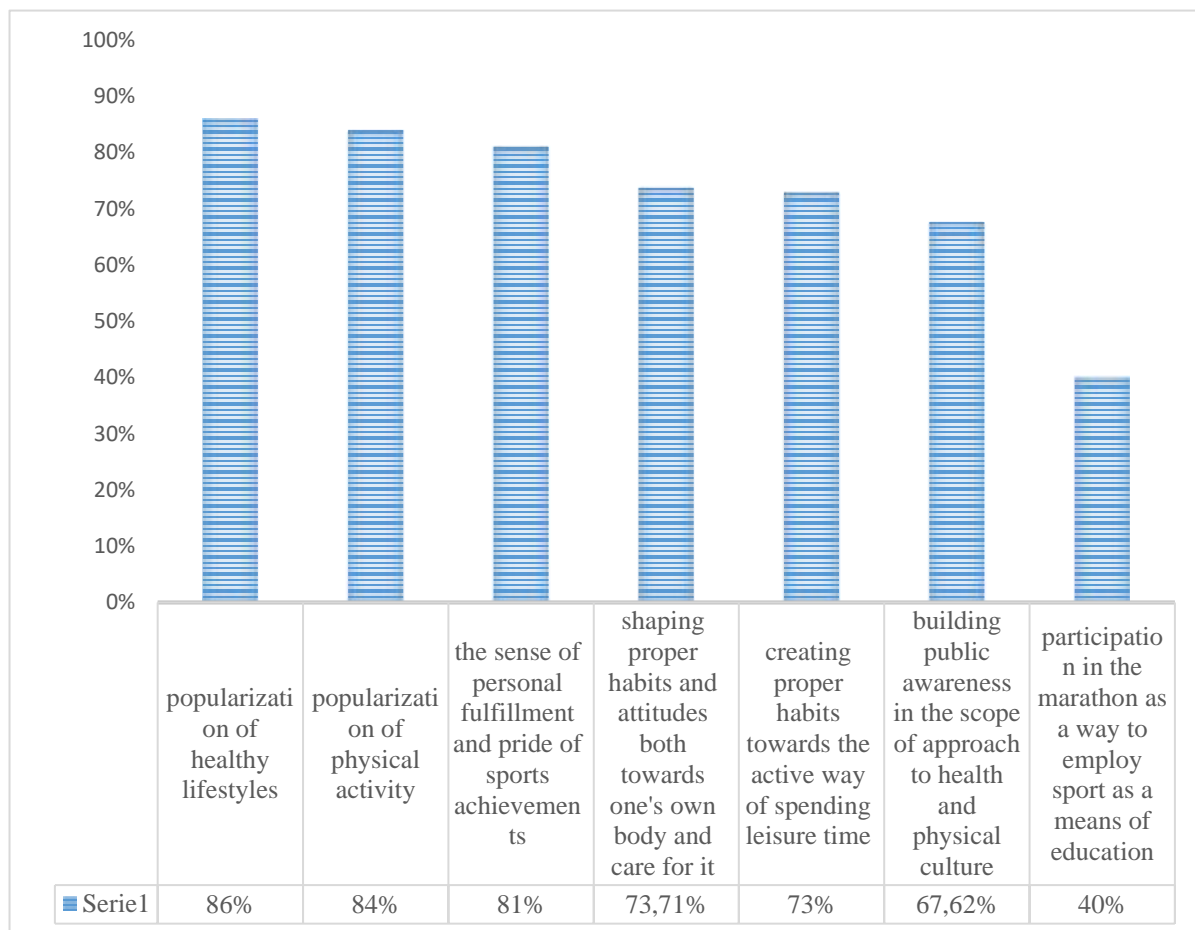


- in 2014 the oldest competitor was 74 years old, and the youngest lion cub was 2 years old, Tarnowo Podgórne, apart from the participants, was visited by 5 thousand visitors,

- in 2017 – 1240 competitors took part in the half marathon.

In order to elicit the opinions of the participants of the marathon held in Tarnowo Podgorne on the popularization of running, health and physical activity and tourism, a diagnostic survey was carried out during "Run of the Lion", on 18 May 2014. 312 participants of the race (both passive and active) were examined, where as much as 86% of the 312 respondents believe that the marathon and all the attractions associated with the event have an impact on the popularization of healthy lifestyles, both among the residents and passive spectators, people accompanying athletes (268 responses ). Equally high (84%) was assessed popularization of physical activity through participating in this type of event (262 responses).

**Figure 1. Positive influence of running sports events organization on passive and active participants on the example of "Lion Run" in Tarnowo Podgorne**



**Source: own development based on research n=312**

The respondents (81%) also believe that the active participation has a very large impact on the sense of personal fulfillment and pride of sports achievements (253 responses). Most of the other factors were also rated very positively. It turns out that the surveyed participants see the impact of such events on shaping proper habits and attitudes both towards one's own

body and care for it - a score of 73.71% (230 responses). The respondents also recognize the positive impact of sports events on creating proper habits towards the active way of spending leisure time - 73% (228 responses). All this is also important in building public awareness in the scope of approach to health and physical culture, 67.62% of the respondents think so. Less than 40% of the respondents consider participation in the marathon as a way to employ sport as a means of education. Perhaps athletes, active participants and their supporters, attached less importance to this factor, however, they recognized it as quite significant.

## **Discussion**

Research into the influence of the organization (more broadly) of sporting events or in the narrow approach, of running events on various aspects of life of their participants were carried out by many researchers. The authors attempted to define their social impact, proving that it is very large and usually positive. They also determined the environmental and economic indicators, indicators of undertaken physical activity, the impact of the sport on the psycho-social condition, and argued that participation in the running events has a direct impact on the sense of life satisfaction and they linked it with loyalty to the organized running event, the psychological aspect of co-participation and the influence of preparations for the event on health and well-being.

The results of the presented research indicates the necessity of creation of an original research workshop which will demonstrate a methodology for measuring the impact of running events according to their classification and types of participants in the context of the motives for participation,

health promotion, and physical activity. The research cannot include marathons. This is caused by the fact that marathon participants blur the actual state of affairs due to "good health" which is required of them, their very high level of physical fitness and a restrictive program of preparation for racing at such a long and exhausting distance. In the context of everyday life both training and running marathons itself require a large amount of free time devoted to trainings and very good health. Marathons are highly exhausting, and people involved in this sport significantly go beyond the range of the condition of a healthy person according to the standards set by the WHO. Therefore it will be necessary to create a proprietary research questionnaire to study the motivation for participation in the mass running events and their impact on health promotion and physical activity based on the modification of Motivations of Marathoners Scales (MOMS) tool. The study will make an attempt to explain the phenomenon of mass popularization of running and to explore the motives for participation in running events in Poland. This will also allow for creating a profile of a runner. Implementation of the adopted research objective will be used for verification of the following research hypotheses: organization of running events even in small localities and in village areas has a direct impact on changing people's attitudes towards health and physical activity; participation in the running events influences the sense of life satisfaction of participants, factors differentiating the motives to participate in running are health condition, level of preparation and type of event.

Recognition of the trend, which is a massive increase in the participation of the Poles in running events in general, allow for achieving the utilitarian objective of the research and for indicating the organizers of running

events which of them have the strongest impact on the growth of a sense of life satisfaction, health and the promotion of physical activity and sport for all.

## **Conclusions**

The organizers take particular care to involve the residents of Tarnowo Podgórne in the event. Run of the Lion is not only a sporting event. It is also a social and charitable action. The participants are marathon runners arriving from all over Poland, but also school youth and whole families. Half marathon distance gathers people who train running regularly, while at a distance of 7 km compete people who run recreationally and want to feel the atmosphere of competition. The joint start of all participants of the race is very well thought out. Both half marathon runners and those who have to overcome a shorter 7-kilometer distance begin the race together. Starting the run together with great runners can have a major impact on the sense of pride and a desire to take up systematic running trainings in the future.

The participation of children in the "Run of Lion Cubs" is also tremendous. In this way, when an organized sports event makes everybody "important": marathon runners, winning-oriented athletes, those running for recreation, beginner runners, youth and children, social awareness in the field of physical culture is shaped, as well as building proper habits of leisure time and creating appropriate attitudes towards physical activity and their health. Pupils and students are also engaged in volunteer work, often regarded as a means of education.

"Run of the Lion" in Tarnowo Podgórne is the best example that a "big event" can be organized in a small town, it can gather the colorful crowd

at the start of the race and can create a spectacle on a par with the most prestigious events in the country. The diagnostic survey conducted shows that Tarnowo Podgorne commune is a "running locality", the residents are active, taking care of their physical condition and health. The event has an impact on shaping pro-healthy attitudes of residents of all ages. Through the popularization of "running" and the organization of great running events, changes in thinking about the towns and regions hosting these events take place. The phenomenon of sports tourism is growing and the generation of active tourists is growing as well.

The results of the presented research carried out during the half-marathon lead to the following general conclusions:

- Organization of running events, especially in small local society, has a direct impact on changing people's attitudes towards health and physical activity.
- Participation in the running events influences the sense of life satisfaction of participants.
- Factors differentiating the motives to participate in running are health condition, level of preparation and type of event.
- Popularization of running and participation in running events have a direct impact on the development of sports tourism. Runners travel around the world to take an active part in organized running events.

The results to the presented research is related to the necessity to continue research into the motives for participation in running events using Motivations of Marathoners Scales (MoMS) tool modified.

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