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Educational and cultural aspects of the activities of sports associations in Poland in the interwar period

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Summary

Sports associations in the interwar period were active in many areas of social life. One of the basic goals they pursued was the training of players who taking active part in various competitions and sports competitions, fought for the highest positions and trophies. However, there were also such organizations whose work went beyond sports competition, focusing also on multidirectional educational and cultural activities. These associations, through special sections, as well as various forms of non-sport activities organized a series of self-education, training, artistic and tourist activities et al. The implementation of these activities, both in the field of sport, as well as in the field of culture and education, raised the prestige of associations among the local community, expanded their leisure activities, liberated social instincts and created a kind of myth [5, p. 127]. Thanks to such initiatives, members expanded their knowledge, developed skills and interests, and as a consequence became more enlightened and conscious citizens-athletes. This diversity of socio-cultural impact also had a direct impact on the formation of personality. Sports organizations as educational environments shaped the character of young sport adepts, shaping prosocial, pro-health and prosomatic attitudes.

Key words: sport associations, education, culture, interwar period

Introduction

A significant feature of sports associations during the interwar period was the strengthening of the impact on the intellectual sphere and moral members through educational and cultural activities. Sports associations addressed a wide range of jobs to the widest possible public. New activities undertaken, both in the sphere of sport, as well as in education and culture, not only increased the capabilities of the association, but also attracted new members. At that time, they had not only the conditions to meet the need for affiliation, but also a sense of broadly understood democratization of culture [7, p. 36]. The comprehensive offer of sports associations supported the process of its recipients' pursuit of self-realization and self-education. This was done, among others, by introducing native cultural achievements, stimulating aesthetic sensitivity, developing skills in using the native language, and showing specific norms and practices. Each sports organization developed different traditions and customs in its educational and cultural activities. The scope of work was characterized by a great variety in the selection of forms and impact measures. Courses, readings, lectures, film screenings, talks, musical evenings, theater performances, tourist trips and various social events were organized. In addition, they also dealt with running reading rooms and libraries at association premises, and in some cases publishing sports newsletters. The choirs and orchestras at the given sports organization also cooperated with these sections [2, p. 338]. Such a wide formula of work was conducive to the exchange of knowledge, experience and skills. The athletes themselves could then develop their talents and interests. To emphasize the importance of such a course of action, associations often already in their names already exposed their own pursuits and aspirations in this regard. The following may be mentioned as examples: in Łódź the Sports and Educational Society "Odrodzenie", the Sports and Educational Association of the Factory "L. Geyera", Łódź Sports and Educational Society, or in Warsaw "Skoda" Cultural and Sports Club or "Orkan" Sports and Educational Society. To achieve the educational goals, many organizations set up special cultural and educational sections [4, p. 51]. And although these departments combined mainly recreation and entertainment activities with educational work [11, p. 43], in the case of young people, emphasis was mainly placed on educational impact. The functioning of these institutions was multidirectional and fulfilled an important integration function in the non-sport life of the organization. In 1918-1939 in Warsaw – according to R. Gawkowski - at least 50 such sections were active in sport associations [2, p. 338]. It can therefore be assumed that they were a kind of measure of the scope of social and cultural work in the Warsaw sports environment.

Contexts of ideological activities had a great impact on the nature of educational and cultural activities of sports associations. Their multidirectionality most often focused on the transmission of political ideologies, propagating patriotic values [15, p. 286], building a climate of social self-help and undertaking actions in the field of military adoption [5, pp. 118-119, 153-155, 182-185]. The effect of the interpenetration of educational and cultural work with ideological and educational upbringing was complementarity of pedagogical interactions, specific to sports associations [8, p. 184]. For example, in the Polish YMCA such an imperative was the development of spirit, mind and body, patriotism in the "Sokół" Gymnastic Society (TG "Sokół"), and in the Workers 'Club of the Workers' Society of the Workers 'University (RKS TUR) and the Workers' Association of Sports "Widzew"

(RTS "Widzew") class struggle. Any extremes and reevaluation in the transmission of specific values and ideas lowered the social rank of sports associations. It happened that the echoes of fierce political struggle at the levels of party power were also reflected on the relations between sports associations remaining in a different political constellation. The ideological conflict was then the cause of antagonisms on the sports level. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the political commitment of the members of the organization shaped their state identity and supported the process of civic socialization.

Among many forms of self-study work, courses played a special role [13, p. 177]. They were usually of an ad-hoc nature, and their subjects most often concerned specialization in a given sport discipline [3, p. 448]. Their participants were usually players with sports experience, as well as outsiders who were sports lovers. During the training, students gained theoretical and methodical knowledge as well as practical skills. The staff running the courses were primarily activists and specialists in the field of physical education and sport, mostly former players. These trainings played an important educational role in the face of the widespread problem of the lack of teachers, trainers and sport trainers.

Read-outs and lectures were another form of training athletes. Well-known athletes or specialists who are authorities in a given discipline of knowledge were invited to conduct them. Among the scholars, lecturers invited by sports associations were, among others: prof. Eugeniusz Piasecki, prof. Stanisław Ciechanowski, Col. Dr. Władysław Osmolski or Col. Juliusz Ulrych. Synthetic presentation of the assessment and views on a given topic - sometimes in a cyclical form (universities) - made it easier for students to learn and understand issues in a given area of knowledge. Furthermore, a well-conducted lecture became an inspiration for lively discussions and searching for literature in a given field of knowledge.

Less official way of propagating knowledge and views on a given topic were talks and chats [14, p. 258]. They were usually run by activists, trainers or leaders. The starting point for this form of meeting was to give the topic of the discussion or read the previously prepared text. During the conversation, participants expressed their opinions on a given problem, asked questions and properly justified their statements. Conversation meetings served to deepen knowledge, develop the ability to express their own views and perceptions, and also fostered the integration of participants-athletes. Additionally, their main asset was the adoption of associates to act in accordance with the slogans and ideas proclaimed.

In order to broaden the thinking horizons of the members of the sports association, reading rooms and libraries were established at its headquarters to promote reading [11, p. 12]. Their activities depended mainly on the material conditions of the organization, which influenced how large and diverse literature collections the given association would have and what housing facilities would be allocated for this type of initiative. In the initial period of educational work of associations in reading rooms, only a few copies of books or magazines were laid out [14, p. 262]. Only together with the development of activities, the volume of library resources increased and, in some organizations, reached several thousand books. Wealthy factory clubs and associations with multifunctional character had the most numerous collections, where the existing sports section was only one of many forms of socio-educational work. Such associations included, for example: Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA) and Society of the Workers' University (TUR). The library book

collection was then used not only by the players but also by other members of the association. Thematic selection of collections was usually varied, as in addition to studies devoted to physical culture, classical, scientific and popular science literature were also made available. In the event of political involvement by the association's authorities, the library also contained works expressing the ideology of a particular political option [2, p. 348]. With the development of educational and cultural activities, reading rooms and libraries were a meeting place and a variety of events. Another form of educational and upbringing work of sport associations was publishing [9, pp. 125-126], focused mainly on editing newspapers, and jubilee materials. Locally published sports magazines had little circulation and usually appeared for a short period of time. Only nationwide magazines had a large circulation. Such newspapers published, among others Shooting Association "Strzelec" ("Strzelec" - circulation: 25,000) and TG "Sokół" ("Gymnastic Guide Sokół - circulation: 50,000) [2, pp. 354-355]. These periodicals informed about the current organizational issues of the association, dates and results of the games, as well as about the outstanding people in the life of the association. Thematic articles published a wide knowledge on matters of broadly understood physical culture. These newspapers included photos, illustrations, caricatures, tables and other forms of graphic description. The main content was often supplemented with so-called Literary and humorous "corners". Reaching members through the written word was aimed at broadening knowledge about the functioning of the association, stimulating active participation in its undertakings and strengthening the sense of belonging. Jubilee publications were edited in a similar vein. They were usually published on the occasion of the "round" anniversary of the establishment of the association and were of historical and educational nature. In these publications, the history of the organization was usually described, the biographies of the founders were presented, and the achievements and accomplishments of the association were presented. These publications were characterized by careful diligence in both content and graphic design. Such studies in the form of one-day books, jubilee publications or commemorative books were published, among others, by the Łódź Sports Club (1908-1924, 1908-1933, 1908-1938), TG "Sokół" in Czeladź (1906-1936), TS "Wisła" (1931, 1936) and LKS "Pogoń" Lviv (1904-1939).

The appearance of jubilee publications was associated with many sporting and cultural events that marked the anniversary of the existence of a given sports organization. In addition to the management and members of the sports association, people with high social and professional status as well as representatives of friendly sports organizations took part in the events. The celebrations lasted from one to several days, during which services as well as, parades, sports competitions, contents, shows, assemblies and social gatherings. Events of this type brought closer the history of the sports association's activities and rose its existence in public awareness.

Establishing and maintaining a choir or sports orchestra was not an easy task, which is why they only appeared in a few sports organizations. This is how R. Gawkowski writes about it: "The genesis of the functioning of sport orchestras and choirs dates back to the 19th century and is associated with the existence of TG "Sokół". [...] After all, the orchestra was necessary to perform exercises with the background music, sing patriotic songs, lead a "falcon" through the city to the rhythm of marching music "[2, p. 341]. In the interwar period, this idea was continued. The active choirs and orchestras had their own repertoire, and

in some cases their members were the authors of the association's anthem. Sports choirs and orchestras participated in various types of ceremonies, special events and political events. Their performances were an important element of the artistic setting, emphasizing the multidirectional development of a given sports organization. These bands also happened to participate in music competitions organized by unions and associations from the non-sport industry. Unfortunately, the waves of the economic crisis and the development of radio broadcasting contributed to the extinction of the activities of many choral groups and orchestras.

A more common form of artistic work was the so-called dramatic clubs that arranged theatrical performances and occasional recitations and declamations [14, p. 260]. In addition to performances in front of the audience of the parent association, these groups also gave commissioned plays, which brought additional budget revenues. The repertoire of performances was varied, as comedies, tragedies and various types of productions about patriotic and political themes were staged [10, p. 39]. The forms of expression used, such as intonation, gestures, facial expressions and pantomime, constituted a platform for cultural communication with the audience. The activity of the dramatic clubs was intended to stimulate the members of the sports association sensitivity, imagination, ability to critically assess the surrounding world, as well as providing a moment of relaxation and rest from the hardships of everyday life. In the case of absence of an artistic section in the association, its activists invited local artists and art creators, organizing special events.

The interwar period was also a time of dynamic development of film art, when at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s sound and color were introduced. Access to watching film screenings, as well as the functioning of the cinematographic industry itself, depended mainly on financial factors. To familiarize members of sports associations with this form of cultural creativity, group outings to the cinema were organized, using so-called mobile cinemas and films were screened at their own expense (e.g. with film cameras). In terms of genre, mostly patriotic and entertainment films were shown.

An important form of cultural and educational activities of sport organizations were assemblies, meetings and social and entertainment events, which created an opportunity to establish new friendships and relationships. These meetings were usually organized on the occasion of various types of calendar holidays and customary association ceremonies. They usually took place in a club room belonging to the association, a dancing room or a specially rented and adapted municipal premises for such events. Events were most often organized for commercial purposes, and the proceeds received funded the association's budget. When organizing the action, sports activists made sure that information about where, when and for whom it would take place was properly disseminated. To attract the largest group of people, a number of attractions were prepared, such as: a good music band, competitions and a cheap buffet. The social provenance of the participants was varied, as both representatives of intellectual and proletarian strata participated in these games. However, a very important role of the organized event was to create alternative entertainment, compared to typical club cafes, dance parties and city feasts [6, p. 193]. In the games organized by sports associations, efforts were made to provide cultural entertainment that did not differ from generally accepted social standards.

Promoting tourism was an important area of functioning of many sports associations [1, p. 101]. Special excursion or tourist sections were established to carry out this activity. Arranging hiking, cycling, rowing and skiing trips was supposed to provide members with an active form of recreation combined with broadening knowledge in the field of sightseeing. In addition to trips typically associated with the interests of members, they also organized entertainment trips that were to bring specific profits to the association's budget. The first type of trips concerned task trips popular at the time, which involved reaching a specific place or covering a designated route (in the country and abroad). They usually travelled in small groups. The second type of trips was organized to nearby towns, where they spent time on feasting and various games [14, pp. 225-231]. Joint travelling fostered the development of inter- and intrapersonal skills, polytechnic education, brought physical and psychological relaxation, enabled closer contact with nature and provided knowledge about the achievements of national culture.

Conclusion

The developed educational activity in associations was aimed at transferring knowledge and skills in the field of sport, physical education, tourism, hygiene, medicine, physiology, history and other areas of life. This diversity of educational work meant, in a sense, an extension and addition to school education. At the same time, it was part of the struggle against illiteracy and leveled out the so-called. secondary illiteracy. Thanks to this type of activities, sports organizations implemented their members into the idea of self-education as one of the most important pillars of lifelong education. In addition, they also prepared for professional work and conscious political and civic life. In terms of education, they focused on preventing demoralization and various types of social maladjustment. As a result, the person actively participating in the life of the association, ending his sports career, left with some knowledge, skills and informal capital of interpersonal contacts that could have an impact on the quality of his or her further life. W. Junosza-Dąbrowski, who wrote about the socio-professional function of sports organizations, pointed out: "[...] unions and clubs [...] should remember, further that they will deserve condemnation, if they allow their members, in a maniac pursuit of triumphs of the field, they wasted their life possibilities, that after a great sports career, diverting from learning and professional work after the period of splendor passed, they would suddenly appear perverted individuals, unprepared for a hard fight for bread, unable to take up any position in social life. On the contrary, they should make sure that they are educators of not playground masters, but valuable people who want to use the virtues acquired on the pitch of virtue for the benefit of the community" [4, pp. 43-44].

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