



A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE POST-WAR HISTORY OF SPORT POLICY IN THE RURAL AREAS OF THE OPOLSKIE REGION

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Abstract

Purpose: This review paper discusses the widely used policy analysis frameworks in sport. Given the lack of an This article outlines the history of the development of sports in rural areas of the Opolskie region in Poland after World War II. The author presents the political context as well as the operations of subsequent state organizations responsible for the promotion of sports in rural areas in the harsh reality of post-war deficits. The author also stresses the role of the Catholic Church in the newly established social structures in the post-war period. While not supportive of the structures, the church feared that the dynamic social changes would result in a decline in church attendance.

The article also discusses the reconstruction and construction of new sport infrastructure in rural areas carried out under a voluntary initiative called Subbotnik. Another period significant in the context of rural sports was the takeover of the People's Sport Teams by the "Service for Poland" National Organization. Operations under its auspices led to an increased sporting activity.

Key words: *sport clubs, athletes, instructor's course, sports facilities, post-war reconstruction of sports, sports in rural areas*

Directions and trends in development, reconstruction of sports infrastructure

From July 1944 to February 1946, sport spontaneously revived and sport initiatives were independently launched in rural areas. There was a favourable climate for any sporting activity thanks to the Government of Ignacy Daszyński, which supported such initiatives. From the very beginning some eager sport organizers and pre-war athletes, although very few, became actively involved and devoted a lot of their time and efforts in restoring and establishing the first post-war sports clubs. The members were mainly recruited from the "Wici" Rural Youth Association (Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej "Wici"), which was reactivated at a rally in Lublin on 27-28 August 1944. The Rural Youth Association had well-established traditions in sporting activity. Physical education and sport were introduced in the statute of the organization. Another stage was to establish a department which would address these matters in the general board. It

managed the issues of physical education in rural areas. The Rural Youth Association established sporting sections in charge of sporting competitions [1].

On 10 March 1946, the 2nd Rally of the Rural Self-Help Association (Związek Samopomocy Chłopskiej) adopted a resolution which stipulated: "in connection with adoption of the decree on the general obligation of physical education, the Rural Self-Help Association took a widespread action to promote physical education in rural areas by organization of physical education centres. As the scheme/programme was of major importance, the 2nd National Rally of the Rural Self-Help Association instructed all organizations and institutions operating in rural areas to become involved and assist in organization and training tasks." [2].

Relatively soon, the General Board of the Rural Self-Help Association established the Inspectorate for the Physical Education and Sport managed by Kazimierz Maciukiewicz,

and run by a small staff including: Zygmunt Makarewicz, Jan Sipowicz and Halina Knoll.

The General Management Board of the Rural Self-Help Association additionally gave instructions to field branches which introduced the resolutions of the rally (A circular issued in the matter, recommended establishment of a position of a physical education clerk in the Provincial Management of the Rural Self-Help Association, allocation of 1% of the budget of each unit of the Association to physical education, construction and renovation of sports fields and gymnasiums; inspection of the existing sports clubs and equipment, invitation of teachers and sports activists to cooperation; organization of physical education centres by the cooperatives of the Association, and in the groups – people's sports centres and organization of tournaments). In the beginning, in 1946, the attention of the inspectorate was directed to program and organizational works which comprised: preparation of physical education programs in rural areas, staff issues in the General Board of the Rural Self-Help Association, propaganda and organization of the People's Sport Teams.

In 1948, all youth organizations in Poland merged into the Union of Polish Youth (Związek Młodzieży Polskiej), a mass organization which enjoyed great influence in cities but also in the country. The Union of Polish Youth got involved in various tasks in this area. The Union was, amongst other things, to have a political role and provide ideological education in professional sport and promote and organize mass events. Sporting events were often combined with political campaigns. The General Board of the Union of Polish Youth was in charge of ideological education in clubs. The lack of its own sports clubs significantly limited the operations of the Union of the Polish Youth. Moreover, the ideological and political education in this organization was not well-received in the circles of qualified athletes [3].

As far as the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego) is concerned, it operated mainly in elementary and secondary schools and strived to be apolitical. In practice, it was impossible to achieve as the then authorities strived to take control of every aspect of youth life, and

education was too important to be left beyond the control of the state. After the fusion of all youth organizations in 1948 and the establishment of the Union of Polish Youth, older scoutmasters were excluded from the organization and in 1950 the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association was dissolved and its members incorporated in the Union of the Polish Youth [4]. By the time the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association ceased to exist, it had taken part in numerous social events, organized scouting camps and picnics. Generally, it met with positive reception (both among repatriates and displaced Poles), and among indigenous Polish communities, including those in the Opolskie province [5]. After the war and a partial restoration of its structures, the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association was mainly involved in the organization of many events and promotion of physical culture among young people: walking trips outside the cities and villages combined with picnics and mountain climbing and canoeing. It aimed at promotion of physical culture and recreation among citizens.

As mentioned above, the operation of the Rural Self-Help Association was quite diversified, ranging from organizational matters to agitation and propaganda. In July 1947, the General Board of the Rural Self-Help Association issued guidelines on promotion of physical culture in rural areas entitled "Promotion of sport in rural areas". The program was quite detailed and defined the tasks for the years 1947-1949, discussed subsequent stages of organizational activity as well as the recommended forms and methods of work in the People's Sport Teams (Ludowe Zespoły Sportowe). It also concerned a system of events, staff training and rules of registration of the Rural Sport Teams. Admittedly, the beginnings were not as smooth and the implementation of the guideline easy.

Organization required solutions to issues which were not included in official guidelines. The management of the Rural Self-Help Association developed a long-term effective concept of promotion of sports in rural areas. However, there were numerous challenges: too few activists to implement the directives and plans in the countryside settings,

equipment shortages which made activists share their own as well as devote their private resources, knowledge and time to stimulate interest in trainees [6]. A lot of hours was allocated to promoting sporting activity in the program of the Labour Corps of the Rural and Military Training.

Eleven months later, bill was passed which provided a comprehensive solution to the matters affecting the youth: the act of the Parliament of the Polish People's Republic of 25 February 1948 which provided for "a general obligation of a professional training, physical education and military training of the youth and organization of physical education and sport." The act established the "Service for Poland" General Organization (Powszechna Organizacja "Służba Polsce") and the Main Office for Physical Education [7].

The Youth Organization of the Association of the Workers' University (Organizacja Młodzieży Towarzystwa Uniwersytetu Robotniczego) was the second most numerous and effective youth organization in the Opolskie province. Its provincial committee was appointed in mid-March 1945 to manage the process of establishing a committee. The first members of the organization were also members of the Polish Socialist Party, who came to the Opolskie province in operational groups. Struggling with low membership in the organization, the Provincial Headquarters of the Association organized a special training course in April 1945 for people coming to the Recovered Territories. The reconstruction of the structures of the Association in the Opolskie region was difficult for the same reasons that affected the Union of Youth Struggle. Despite the difficulties, during the 2nd Provincial Rally of the Association on 17 June 1945, the delegates from Śląsk Opolski informed about significant improvements in the creation of local structures. The total number of members amounted to 1,000. The Association was predominantly active among the working youth and slightly less in educational institutions and in the rural areas.

A lot later, the "Wici" Rural Youth Association of the People's Republic in the Śląsk Opolski region started to develop. It was

not until 6 May 1945 that its manifesto was published in the "Czyn Młodych" biweekly which recommended organizing a network of clubs in the Śląskie province.

Those organizational efforts by the autumn of 1945, including the then authorities providing auxiliary staff, proved to be unsuccessful, mainly due to the split of the people's movement into the People's Party and the Polish People's Party and the competition between these two for influence in the youth organization. The first "Wici" clubs in Śląsk Opolski were probably established in the Opolskie county.

An interim county management was appointed as late as in autumn 1945. Constant struggles within the organization prevented the election of permanent county authorities for months. It was not until the "Wici" Union of Polish Youth and the Association began cooperation in January 1948 that the County Management in Opole was elected. The number of the members in the organization grew at a similar rate as in the remaining counties of Śląsk Opolski. In spring 1946, the "Wici" circles clubs operated in the following counties: Grodkowski, Kluczborski, Nyski, Oleski, Opolski, Prudnicki, Raciborski and Strzelecki. Significant organizational progress was recorded in spring 1947, that is from the time when the process of democratisation in the "Wici" Union of Polish Youth of the People's Republic began. On the eve of the unification of the "Wici" youth organizations in the Śląskie province, the structures had 13,584 members, 8,500 of whom were based in Śląsk Opolski. Sporting events organized by the "Wici" Union of Polish Youth of the People's Republic were mass events with a purpose to promote sports among the largest possible numbers of village inhabitants.

The beginnings of the People's Sport Teams in the Opolskie Region, as in the whole country, were linked with the decree by the Provisional Government of National Unity in January 1946 which resolved that the Association of Rural Self-Help (Związek Samopomocy Chłopskiej) would be in charge of physical education.

However, the role of the Catholic Church in the newly established structures

should also be mentioned. Fearing that the dynamic social changes would divert the churchgoers from the church, it opposed the establishment of the structures, criticizing, in particular, women's interest in physical culture and sports [8]. However, there were a few exceptions, such as the positive attitude of the parson of Czarnowas (a village in the Podole area), Henryk Mainka to physical culture and sports. He approved of the youth playing sports and their participation in competitions. Henryk Mainka, a parson in the years 1932-1975, believed that it was very important to present a positive image of the rural areas. A similar approach was adopted in Markowice Raciborskie by priest Leon Urbański who strongly encouraged taking up sports. His pastoral mission lasted from 1932 to 1950. This revolutionary approach of the Church most probably stemmed from the fact that it saw sports as a solution to the problem of a gradual decline in moral values, also in the countryside, and mainly among the young who smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol. While the reasons for such habits, postwar trauma and weak prospects for the people living in rural areas, were known, the Church saw a remedy for social problems in shifting the attention of the young from such temptations to sports. Indeed, after a period of exercise, they came to appreciate increased fitness, which carried over into better performance in other areas, including farming.

After the end of World War II, the process of reconstruction of sport facilities in the Opolskie region was very slow. There were many reasons to it. First of all, the Poles who had moved to the area, as well as the indigenous people, had fears related to the future of the land and stability of the borders along the Odra and Nysa Łużycka rivers. It was a factor which was extremely deeply rooted in the people and which for years was fed by the demands and threats of the return from the revisionists from the Federal Republic of Germany. The situation continued until the beginning of the 70s, with lacking funds being the underlying cause. The national post-war reconstruction focused largely on factories and industrial plants as crucial for a speedy launch of production. In the Opolskie region, the main

industry reconstruction efforts concerned the local cement works and ironworks, rail wagon repair plants, river ports and many other mechanical plants, such as the pre-war "Tempo" plant in Opole. Another urgent issue was the reconstruction of the remaining housing infrastructure, which was highly important for the authorities as an incentive for the settlers from the Recovered Territories. It was not until 1950, and the establishment of the Opolskie province, that the construction of sports and recreational facilities gained momentum. In fact, the Provincial Association of the People's Sport Teams (Wojewódzkie Zrzeszenie LZS) in Opole started its work on 1 September 1952, i.e. the moment when the positions so far filled by the employees of the Provincial Headquarters of the "Service for Poland" National Organization were available to staff the Provincial Association.

During the 1st Conference of the Provincial Association (1953), ambitious resolutions on the construction of sports and recreation facilities were adopted. The plans included 429 various sports facilities as part of the Subbotnik (volunteer unpaid work on weekends) work, including: 45 football pitches, 100 volleyball courts, 20 basketball courts, 7 handball courts, 5 gymnastics courts, 50 straight running tracks, four-lane tracks, 10 stadium running tracks of 400m, 130 long jump tracks, 40 steeplechase tracks, 12 airgun shooting ranges, 2 small-bore shooting ranges and 5 swimming tracks in open waters [9].

The National Council board in Dobrzeń Wielki under a resolution of 24 March 1952 proposed to transfer the property of a 2.4-hectare plot located in the Chróśnice settlement, owned by the district authorities, to the "Wiktoria" People's Sport Club in Chróścice. The efforts of the pitch and court construction committee and the Provincial Physical Culture Committee led to the construction of a football pitch [9]. The Provincial Physical Culture Committee in 1953 granted an investment subsidy of 60 000 Polish zloty for the construction of a sports field for the People's Sport Club in Gorzów Śląski (Olesno county). The agreement was signed by the representatives of the Provincial Physical Culture Committee (WKKF) and the Provincial

Association of the People's Sport Teams (WZ LZS). The next stage was to establish the construction committee. As part of the Subbotnik scheme, the area was levelled and the members of the People's Sport Teams organized a trip into the forest to obtain wood to construct a fence around the pitch and the District Agricultural Machines Centre. When levelling the area for the sports field, the employees of the Centre, members of the People's Sport Teams and the Union of Polish Youth, spent 60 hours, out of the total of 403 hours worked as part of the Subbotnik programme, to complete the task. They also constructed a running track of 100m. However, lack of the construction documents constituted a serious problem in using a loan, which in consequence hindered purchase of the construction materials.

Based on information from the Provincial Headquarters of the "Service for Poland" National Organization concerning the sports equipment and facilities in the Oleski district, apart from a few minor renovations carried out at football pitches and long-jump tracks, [10]no new sport facilities were built. In the Opolski county, 9 football pitches, 3 basketball and 2 volleyball courts were constructed in 1953 as part of the Subbotnik. Six of them were in the following settlements: Krzyżowa Dolina (Ozimek district), Chrzastowice (Chrzastowice district), Ligota Prószkowska (Prószków district), Brzezie (Dobrzeń Wielki district), Siołkowice (Popielów district) and Jaśkowice (Prószków district), however, three of them were completed in: Krzanowice (Czarnowąsy district), Przysiecz and Zimnice Małe (Prószków district). Basketball courts were constructed in Zimnice Małe, Czarnowąsy and Szczepanowice, and volleyball courts in Dąbrowa Górna and Ligota Prószkowska [10]. In the Niemodliński county, as part of the festival in 1953, the local youth constructed 11 volleyball courts and renovated 5. Moreover, one basketball court, 6 medium-sized football pitches, 3 long-jump tracks and 8,100-metre running tracks were constructed [10].

In the Raciborski county, three facilities were constructed during the Subbotnik initiative which covered 980 labour hours. One

of them was the pitch field in Wojnowice settlement (Krzanowice county) with a 375-metre running track around the pitch, a long jump track and a volleyball court. The projects were completed as part of the Subbotnik by members of the local People's Sport Team and the Service for Poland National Organization units, aided by the local State Agricultural Farm. Another investment in this area was the construction of a sports field in Samborowice (Pietrowice Wielkie county). Also, Wojnowice residents collectively constructed a sports field with a 400-metre four-lane running track, a volleyball court and a long-jump track. The third major investment in the Raciborski county was the construction of the sports field in Stanica (Rudy Wielkie district), where a volleyball court and a long-jump track was also constructed and the members of the People's Sport Team fenced the field in the Subbotnik scheme [10].

The beginning of sport promotion and the role of the "Service for Poland" National Organization and its cooperation with the People's Sport Teams

The beginnings of activities aimed at promotion of sport in rural areas started in the period of ongoing war activities, in summer 1944 and lasted until the end of 1951. Afterwards, the People's Sport Teams were taken over by the "Service for Poland" National Organization.

Overall, the process of sport promotion in rural areas may be divided into three periods.

July 1944 – February 1946

A period of spontaneous revival and organization of sports movement in rural areas. At that time, there was a climate for every "modern" activity promoted by the then people's government. Full of enthusiasm, people devotedly took part in many projects. The few pre-war activists and sports people organized the first sport clubs in the country. They mainly came from the "Wici" Union of Polish Youth, which was reactivated during the rally in Lublin on 27-28 August 1944. It was a very difficult period. From the very beginning the Union of Youth Struggle played an

important role in organization of the physical culture in rural areas after liberation. There were various sport sections opened within the Union of Youth Struggle, all based on pre-war models. In the "recovered territories", including the Opolskie region, the newly opened sport clubs also relied on such models. Apart from the local indigenous activists, a group of immigrant activists and military settlers contributed significantly to the promotion of physical education in rural areas and created the first forms of such education. At that time, the Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza) played an important role in the promotion of physical culture in rural areas and its Central Committee in June 1945 adopted a resolution on the activity of the Union of Youth Struggle stressing the significance of physical education. "You should systematically promote education and political program and physical education among all youth groups." [11]. The subject of health and physical fitness in rural areas was even more prominent at the 1st rally in December 1945, when the resolution on the youth stated: "in education we should implant a liking for play, endurance in implementation of ideological objectives, romanticism in our youth should be directed to a positive and fruitful work for reconstruction of the country and creation of the peoples' democratic Poland. We should uproot with full force all the poison which was planted in our youth such as racism, chauvinism or anti-Semitism, fight against any attributes of demoralisation among the youth and fight for morality and physical fitness." [11].

The local radical peoples' movement was in charge of the future of the youth, its health and physical education and sports. The 5th People's Party Congress, which took place in January 1946, saw more motions with an appeal to the President of the Ministers' Council to issue "an act aimed at designation of a adequate area for a sports field in each district of the People's Republic. The 5th People's Party Congress also insisted that the newly created National Council for Physical Education and Military Training (PRWFiPW) under the Ministry of National Defence should include rural representatives and party activists from the Central Institute for Physical Education

(CIWF) in Bielany, Warsaw, in order to provide training to the new physical education instructors as soon as possible." Due to the fact that there was no sports equipment available in remote and underdeveloped areas, the 5th People's Party Congress requested that the National Office for Physical Education and Military Training construct sports fields and possibly in-door swimming pools in all towns and cities in Poland as soon as possible [12]. A real breakthrough in the promotion of physical culture were the decrees issued by the Provisional Government of National Unity of January 1946 on physical education offices and councils and military training and the general obligation of physical education [13]. It was decided then that the Rural Self-Help Association would be in charge of physical education in rural areas. Soon Kazimierz Maciukiewicz became a secretary in the newly established Physical Education and Military Training Council.

March 1946 – December 1948

The state had created conducive conditions for the advancement of physical culture in rural areas. On 10 March 1946, the 2nd Rally of the Rural Self-Help Association adopted a resolution which stipulated: "In connection with adoption of the decrees on the general obligation of physical education, the Rural Youth Association has taken a widespread action to promote physical education in rural areas by organizing physical education centres. As that scheme was a priority, the 2nd National Rally of the Rural Self-Help Association instructed all organizations and institutions operating in rural areas to become involved and support organization and training tasks." [14]. In July 1947, the Management of the Rural Self-Help Association issued guidelines on promotion of physical culture in rural areas entitled "Promotion of sport in rural areas," which was a detailed document stipulating the tasks for the years 1947-1949, discussed subsequent stages of organization, forms and methods of activity, events, staff training and rules of registration of People's Sport Teams. As such, it was a pioneering document, which required many corrections that were never made.

Another weakness of the idea was the shortage of skilled staff in the countryside. Additionally, the General Board of the Rural Self-Help Association itself was not really concerned about physical culture and sports. Such an attitude of the management of the Rural Self-Help Association can be explained by their involvement in many other, more urgent matters. Initiatives aimed at sport promotion in rural areas coincided with the agreement in March 1947 between the Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Reforms and the Ministry of National Defence, which issued an order to merge agricultural and military training organizations. In this way, the Agricultural and Military Training Organization (Przysposobienie Rolniczo-Wojskowe) was established, whose role was to organize staff training courses, including physical education classes, for thousands of activists. Eleven months later, a new law was enacted which was aimed at a comprehensive solution. It was the act of the Sejm of the Polish People's Republic of 25 February 1948 On general obligation of a professional training, physical education and military training of the youth and organization of physical education and sport, [15] which established the "Service for Poland" General Organization and the Main Office for Physical Education. "Service for Poland" became involved in initiatives promoting physical culture in rural areas, which was effective possible thanks to good organizational structures including district militia stations. Yet, the promotion of sports in rural areas was only partly successful. One of the reasons for failures was the fact that the youth organizations were unwilling to cooperate with the People's Sport Teams. The organizations were more interested in political activity and propaganda than physical culture. They refused to accept the leading role of the Rural Self-Help Association in this domain. At the end of the 40s, the then physical culture authorities, i.e. the National Office for Physical Education and Military Training and the National Council for Physical Education and Military Training became involved in the promotion of sport in rural areas. However, due to the economic situation in Poland, its administrative discretion was limited. The

direction taken by the combined forces of the National Office for Physical Education and Military Training and the National Council for Physical Education and Military Training concerned staff training and was highly important for further development of the organization, however, it was not used by the Rural Self-Help Association. Another example of an inappropriate approach of the Rural Self-Help Association was the registration and participation in training centres, which - as a rule - were not fully used. A new situation and hopes for further development arose when the youth movement was united. In July 1948, a single youth organization, the Union of Polish Youth (Związek Młodzieży Polskiej), was established.

To sum up, the second period in the process of promotion of sport in rural areas was marked by certain organizational obstacles (insufficient organizational experience and management of such a large organization as People's Sport Teams), however, thanks to substantial financial outlay, the state had a significant impact on the development of physical culture in rural areas. At that time 1,125 People's Sport Teams were established with 49,940 members, including 9,933 women.

December 1948 – March 1952

The third and final period discussed in this paper began with the establishment of the Councils of Rural Sport at the turn of 1948 and 1949. The budget was increased, and so was the number of professional staff in them. A significant innovation in the management of the Councils of Rural Sport was the obligatory stage of planning in their operations. Generous financial support provided by the state made the operations of the Rural Self-Help Association more effective, and the political and organizational support by the Union of Polish Youth and the Service for Poland resulted in increased popularity and an impressive number of 8,743 People's Sport Teams and 309,748 members, including 81,338 women, by the end of 1951. Public funds were used for the construction of the first professional sports stadiums and providing equipment for the majority of the newly established People's Sport Teams. Events and

qualification tournaments for the "Fit for Work and Defence" badge were successful in attracting the rural youth to more regular training.

In 1947, another institution which played an important role in the development of physical culture in rural areas was established. The Agricultural and Military Training Institution (Przysposobienie Rolniczo-Wojskowe) was to combine agricultural and military training along with intensive ideological training. However, physical education constituted up to 33% of the overall training time to make the instruction programme more attractive.

The Union of Youth Struggle's records provide a description of the tasks of the Agricultural and Military Training Institution: "agricultural education in the form specified by Agricultural and Military Training Institution is one of the powerful factors in transforming the rural youth, and a serious section of the front-line in the ideological struggle of the new People's Poland with anachronism." [16]. The main task of the Agricultural and Military Training Institution was to prepare the young rural staff to transform rural areas with the introduction of new methods of management and, more importantly, change the rural youth's mindsets. The transformation was aimed at attracting the youth with new ideas, even if opposed to the views of their own parents. The organization, headed by Lieutenant Colonel Jan Pokrzywa (a political officer of the 1st Polish Army and the Legislative Sejm member), openly demonstrated an ideological character. Political disputes concerning control over rural areas, and thereby over physical culture, ended when all youth organizations were united into the Union of Polish Youth in 1948 and the Service for Poland National Organization was established.

The "Service for Poland" National Organization played an important role in the promotion of physical culture in the country, a role which was specified in a resolution by the Political Office of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party in September 1949. Established in 1952, the People's Sport Teams Association was put under the

administration of Service for Poland National Organization, which combined the obligation of physical education, military training, cultural and educational activity, and political indoctrination. The Service for Poland National Organization played a major role in providing good conditions for the promotion of physical culture in rural areas through the construction of sports facilities and supplies of equipment [17]. The fact that the Service for Poland administered a large network of staff in all rural districts was a conducive factor in the development of physical culture in rural areas. In the first years, there were three employees per one district [18].

The Service for Poland National Organization started its operations in Śląsk Opolski in spring 1948 under Captain Józef Stawiszyński, the provincial commander, and Lieutenant Leonard Stawiszyński, his assistant. Following the inauguration ceremonies held throughout the Śląskie Province on 20-21 March 1948, promotion committees were established in each county. In March, county commanders ordered the first registration of people born between 1929 and 1931. Still, problems remained, and the establishment of the first Service for Poland National Organization units was hindered by shortages of competent staff, low-quality equipment and the initial negative attitudes of the older population towards the organization. The transformation of the National Council for Physical Education into the Service for Poland National Organization caused even more confusion and did not improve its image in local communities. While the youth tended to welcome the idea of being called up for the service, the older residents had their reservations concerning the uniforms. It is worth mentioning that both political parties and the administrative authorities in the region signalled those concerns voiced by the local communities concerning the place and role of the mass organization. The concerns were additionally supported by the consistently critical attitude of the Catholic Church towards the Service for Poland. The Church regarded it as a communist organization aimed at fighting religion and demanded that the organization should be apolitical and freedom of religious practice guaranteed.

At the turn of June and July 1948, the Service for Poland National Organization in Śląsk Opolski had 5,756 members altogether, with the following membership numbers in the counties: Opolski 1590, Strzelecki 870, Raciborski 700, Kozielski 500 and Głubczycki 541. In the post-war period, the youth united in this organization was involved in a number of useful projects: removal of debris from cities, helping out in harvest time, and many other agricultural jobs such as land improvement and irrigation. Efforts were also made to remove any traces of German inhabitants in the area, for example, German inscriptions found in the area.

That 5-year period was marked by high involvement of the locals, sport activists and employees of the "Service for Poland" in administrative and sporting activities. A significantly lower number of members, according to an official report, was taken over from the Rural Self-Help Association (by the end of 1952, the number of team members was 284,649, i.e. 15,099 fewer than in 1951) [19]. In subsequent years the number gradually increased and by the end of 1955 the organization boasted 14,606 units and 549,111 members, including 101,760 women [19].

In the first year, the activities the Association under the supervision of the "Service for Poland" National Organization became more intense. From the very beginning a lot of new sport disciplines were introduced, formerly unknown or never practised in rural areas. Another benefit of the management of the People's Sport Teams by the "Service for Poland" was better sporting equipment, mainly that supplied for practising defence disciplines. The "Service for Poland" units also developed their own equipment manufactures and set up "repair clubs" within the organization (In propaganda publications and instructions the "Service for Poland" National Organization from the years 1951–1955 there were many various tips how to manufacture different types of sporting gear and equipment on one's own, mainly in such disciplines as: fencing, archery, shooting, light athletics, weight lifting and others). The management of the "Service for Poland" successfully lobbied the department of agriculture and the State Agricultural Farms.

Their interventions were often aimed at affecting decisions under which plants could manufacture sporting gear. They also had a role in decision concerning the construction of sports fields [20].

From 1953, a new concept for planning in sports facilities construction was introduced within the Subbotnik scheme, which contributed to state-financed large-scale development of sports facilities in rural areas. As a result, 85 fully equipped stadiums were commissioned and 141 sports facilities were renovated and reconstructed, and the construction of another 149 stadiums started [20]. The state provided financial subsidies through the "Service for Poland" National Organization, the total of which increased from PLN 16,676 in 1952 to 33,031 in 1955. [21]. The state funds alone allowed for the purchase of sporting gear worth over 29 million Polish zloty for the rural physical education centres in the years 1952-1955. Considerable amounts were also spent on training social activists in rural areas. Comprehensive cultural and educational activity took place within the Service for Poland units, which allocated huge funds to promote sports and employ professional staff in rural areas.

The Service for Poland National Organization cooperated with the physical culture units in rural areas and implemented a policy of attracting girls to sporting activity. In that period, the supervision of the "Service for Poland" National Organization over rural sport manifested itself in a widespread propaganda campaign coupled with a variety of sporting activities (Apart from numerous propaganda actions mentioned above, the significance of a few handbooks issued in the years is worth stressing, the most important are: *Poradnik Wiejskiego Sportowca* (praca zbiorowa), SiT, Warszawa 1953; J. Zajdel, *Działalność LZS*, SiT, Warszawa 1955; J. Ciszewski, *Piłka nożna w LZS*, SiT, Warszawa 1955; A. Kaczyńska, *Pływanie w LZS*, SiT, Warszawa 1955; M. Niewiadomski, *Gimnastyka w LZS*, SiT, Warszawa 1955). As part of those efforts, the first *Przegląd Sportowy – wydanie dla wsi* weekly was published on 1 August 1953, and from 1954 Polish Radio started to broadcast: Rural sportsmen and

women get ready! (The program was prepared by a person of merit for the physical culture – W. Zajkowski) Moreover, the Service for Poland” promoted sports and fitness in numerous publications, such as: “We work in the day-room”, “Service for Poland”, “Employee tutorial”, and from 1952, “Service for Poland” and “People’s Sport Team Employee tutorial”, (The “Poradnik Pracownika SP i LZS” monthly which was published contained approximately 20% of articles and approximately 15% of text was devoted to physical education. Instruction materials to defence sport classes were of similar sizes.) which featured articles on current activities and practical materials for physical education instructors. They proved helpful in the work of the staff and social activists in rural areas. Gradually, activity of sport teams expanded to include the state plants and state-owned agricultural farms. The cooperation was supported by the then Ministry of State Agricultural Farms and General Zygmunt Berling, the vice-minister. In the years 1953–1955 the system of athletic meetings was introduced for the first time in national plants and state agricultural farms with the central athletic meeting of the State Agricultural Farms in 1954. It caused that it was necessary for the agricultural administration to become interested in physical culture and in consequence increasing outlay for activity, equipment and gear [22].

Promoting and organizing sports in rural areas was also on the agenda of the Centre of Agricultural Cooperatives (Centrala Rolniczej Spółdzielczości), and its former president Tadeusz Jańczyk, which ran supply and sale cooperatives. Other cooperative units, which also supported sports in the countryside, were the Provincial Associations of District Cooperatives (Wojewódzkie Związki Gminnych Spółdzielni), County Associations of District Cooperatives (Powiatowe Związki Gminnych Spółdzielni), and District Cooperatives [23].

On the other hand, despite all those indisputable achievements of that period, there were also weak areas in the operations of the Service for Poland, especially the ways of subsidizing rural sports. The financing was

based on irregular subsidies, each time granted by order of the chief commander of the Service for Poland. The system was inefficient as the payments failed to take into account actual deadlines or encourage an economical approach, and prevented long-term budget planning [24].

The military models of management and work in the Service for Poland were not appropriate for the demands of rural sport units. That was one of the reasons why the district councils were dissolved during the reporting and election campaign conducted in 1954–1955 and the efforts to create the People’s Sport Teams councils in their place failed [25]. That was not a right decision as significantly smaller organizational units, i.e. groups, should not decide about the liquidation of the councils. Another problem was fierce competition between associations, which resulted in the collapse of newly established units.

Preparations for the 2nd national rally were made with the crisis in the background. In the discussions over the necessary steps in the wake of the liquidation of the “Service for Poland” National Organization, one of the many ideas put forward proposed a division of the association into separate organizations for rural areas and the agricultural sector, which would have different reporting lines, i.e. the Union of Polish Youth or the Soldier Friends’ League (Liga Przyjaciół Żołnierza). The matter was settled at the session of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party [26]. In autumn 1954, following the party management’s decision, steps were taken by the Association to gain independence by establishing financial units in the main council and provincial councils and by curbing direct supervision by the Service for Poland in matters which were within the competences of the Councils [27]. On 21-22 April 1955, the 2nd National Rally of the People’s Sport Teams was held in Warsaw, which gave new directions for the promotion of physical culture in rural areas, and amended the statutes. Jan Zajdel, the last chief commander of the Service for Poland, was elected chairman of the Council [28]. At the end of 1955, the “Service for Poland” National Organization was liquidated and its training staff were transferred to the People's Sport

Teams. The association, while gaining independence, was generously subsidized and

provided with facilities, such as the training centre in Przemyśl and many offices.

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