



## FROM HALF-MARATHON TO TRIATHLON: SPORTS PARTICIPATION AS A REFLECTION OF POST-MATERIALISM PROCESSES IN POLISH SOCIETY

**Abstract** - This article examines the relationship between cultural change processes and the practice of running and the practice of triathlon in Poland. The main goal of the research is to show that the socio-cultural tendency that made the development and growth in mass sporting events participation in Poland possibly has been influenced by two general trends. The first is the spread of post-materialist values that have incited changes in the prevailing cultural tendencies. The second is the massive increase of individualization processes, where beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of individuals are increasingly based on personal decisions and depend less on tradition and social institutions. The presented work in this article is based on literature review which shows changes in active participation in sporting life in Poland. People participate in sporting events not only for physical activity, but also for socio-psychological effects. The experienced runners need comprehensive physical activity and experience strong emotions, which are at the top of hierarchy of post-modern human needs.

**Keywords:** triathlon; sports participation; human needs.

## DA MEIA-MARATONA AO TRIATLO: A PARTICIPAÇÃO ESPORTIVA COMO REFLEXO DOS PROCESSOS PÓS-MATERIALISMO NA SOCIEDADE POLONESA

**Resumo** - Este artigo examina a relação entre os processos de mudança cultural, prática de corrida e do triatlo na Polónia. O principal objetivo da pesquisa é mostrar que uma tendência sociocultural que possibilitou o desenvolvimento e o crescimento da participação em eventos esportivos de massa na Polónia foi possivelmente influenciada por outras duas tendências gerais. O primeiro é a disseminação de valores pós-materialistas que incitaram mudanças nas tendências culturais predominantes. O segundo é o aumento maciço dos processos de individualização, em que as crenças, atitudes e comportamentos dos indivíduos são cada vez mais baseados em decisões pessoais e dependem menos da tradição e das instituições sociais. O trabalho apresentado neste artigo é baseado em revisão de literatura que mostra mudanças na participação ativa na vida esportiva na Polónia. As pessoas participam de eventos esportivos não apenas pelo atividade física, mas também para efeitos sociopsicológicos. Os corredores experientes precisam de atividade física abrangente e experimentam emoções fortes, que estão no topo da hierarquia das necessidades humanas pós-modernas.

**Palavras-chave:** triathlon; esporte para todos; necessidades humanas.

## DEL MEDIO MARATÓN AL TRIATLÓN: LA PARTICIPACIÓN DEPORTIVA COMO REFLEXIÓN DE LOS PROCESOS POSTERIORES AL MATERIALISMO EN LA SOCIEDAD POLACA

**Resumen** - Este artículo examina la relación entre los procesos de cambio cultural, carrera y triatlón en Polonia. El principal objetivo de la investigación es mostrar que una tendencia sociocultural que permitió el desarrollo y el crecimiento de la participación en eventos deportivos masivos en Polonia posiblemente estuvo influenciada por otras dos tendencias generales. El primero es la difusión de valores posmaterialistas que impulsaron cambios en las tendencias culturales predominantes. El segundo es el aumento masivo de los procesos de individualización, en los que las creencias, actitudes y comportamientos de los individuos se basan cada vez más en decisiones personales y dependen menos de la tradición y las instituciones sociales. El trabajo presentado en este artículo se basa en una revisión de la literatura que muestra cambios en la participación en la vida deportiva en Polonia. Las personas participan en eventos deportivos no solo por actividad física sino también con fines sociopsicológicos. Los corredores experimentados necesitan mucha actividad física y experimentan emociones fuertes, que están en la cima de la jerarquía de las necesidades humanas posmodernas.

**Palabras-clave:** triatlón; deporte para todos; necesidades humanas.

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## Introduction

Running as an extremely popular discipline and marathon running is a leisure behavior that has seen growth during the past decade, also in Poland<sup>1-3</sup>. Authors of these work have recently observed a new trend in Poland which is mass triathlon participation: the transformation between popularity of mass running events participation and the need to invoke strong emotions, seek them in more difficult sports disciplines and travel to participate in the event.

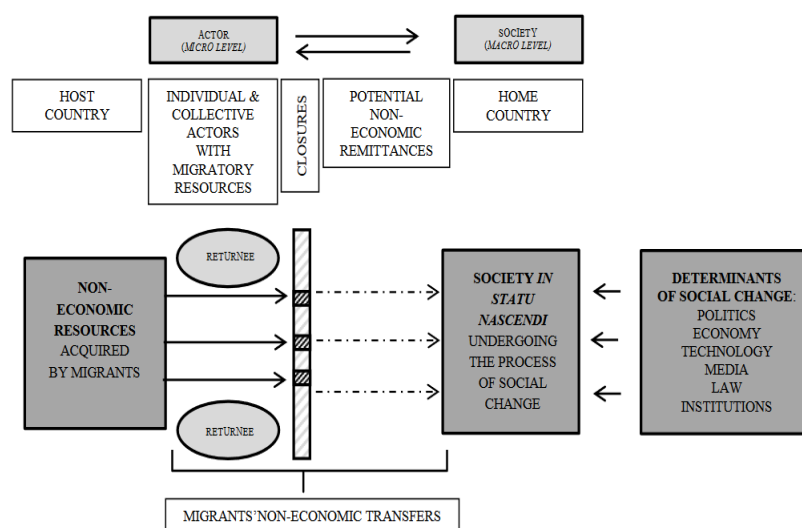
The relationship between post-materialism and physical and sports activity has been studied in Spain<sup>4</sup>. In these studies, the author conclude that the cultural change fosters the coexistence of sports practices of materialist and post-materialist orientations; the former is embodied by traditional competitive amateur sports and the latter by new ways of practicing and experiencing sports that are more focused on developing individuality and enjoying nature. Llopis-Goig<sup>4</sup> in 2014 refers to the earlier views of Inglehart who claims that there is a greater adoption of post-materialist values in more developed societies and, within these same societies, in the social groups with greater socioeconomic capacity<sup>5</sup>. Regarding the latter proposition, Inglehart<sup>6</sup> points out that even when societies turn completely toward post-materialism, cultural change finds greater resistance among the adult population, so that young people obtain higher scores on post-materialism. Transferred this theory to the sport sphere, Llopis-Goig<sup>4</sup> claims that the materialist orientation would be more closely associated (on both historical and sociocultural levels) with traditional federated sport and competition, with their greater emphasis on disciplined training and sports performance. The author considered that the post-materialist orientation, would foster a distancing from federated sport and competition and a preference for sports practices directed toward the maintenance or achievement of good physical condition, well-being, and appearance, as well as outdoor exercise in natural settings. All of these practices have experienced a noteworthy increase in western societies in the past few decades<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, the observed increase in free time and the growth of post-materialist values cause another tendency that can be considered fundamental in the configuration of a sociocultural predisposition toward running: a massive emergence of individualization processes<sup>4</sup>. Individualization is described as a process where individuals' beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors are increasingly based on personal choices and depend less and less on traditional social institutions like the

family, the local community, the church and social classes. In the new social context, each individual feels impelled to decide each of the actions he/she performs throughout life, determine the criteria for his/her own social orientation, and direct his/her own life story according to the available resources<sup>7-9</sup>.

Dzięgielewski's<sup>10</sup> research on changes in Polish society after 1989 show that they take place under the influence of human migration, which have an impact on social changes at the level of non-economic transfers<sup>10</sup>. He proposed model of migrants' non-economic transfers to home country (society undergoing social change). He identify three main types of closure in his model (Figure 1)

[...] socio-economic, cultural and psycho-social. Socio-economic closures are factors which come from the social and economic system at any given time, such as unemployment or low social capital in the country. Cultural closures are factors that are present in the cultural structure of the sending society, such as common norms, values and behaviours. psycho-social closures relate to personality, attitudes and mental structure<sup>10</sup> (p. 175).

**Figure 1. Model of migrants' non-economic transfers to home country**



Source: Dzięgielewski<sup>10</sup>

According to Dzięgielewski<sup>10</sup>, this model includes the conditions that are necessary for successful non-economic transfers by migrants to Poland. The author believes that a migrant must acquire experience, identity, knowledge, behavior, or

lifestyle elements abroad in order to be able to apply them in Poland. Migration resources must be perceived as innovative from the perspective of the cultural structure in the home country, from the social perspective and from the perspective of the migrant himself. The return migrant must also become an actor of social change<sup>10</sup>.

Polish society has undergone a social change which was initiated in 1989 by the political, economic, and socio-cultural transformation. Post-accession migration from Poland is seen as part of this change and return migrants as potential actors of change (non-economic transfers). It was a process of transformation from a pre-modern society to a model of well-developed, post-modern Western societies from which migrants return. It was then that the values, norms, behaviors, attitudes, and lifestyle learned abroad were introduced and disseminated in the country of origin. It was a prerequisite for successful transfers to Poland, i.e., earlier acquisition of ideas, know-how, behavior, or lifestyle elements abroad and being a returnee. Such people had an impact on social changes in Poland<sup>10</sup>.

After the political changes in 1989, the physical activity of Poles has increased dynamically. Poles also began to travel and gain experience in contact with the society of the countries they visited. Popularization of pro-social behaviors, pro-health behaviors and mass participation in recreational sports in Poland also show changes in the approach to health and quality of life. After Poland's accession to the European Union, it was at the bottom of the list of European countries in terms of physical activity; currently it is in the middle. This is rapid growth, and now the media and politicians are trying to consolidate this trend to encourage the elderly also to participate<sup>11,12</sup>.

The end of the 1990s in Poland was a time of intense and rapid transformation of a planned economy into a free-market capitalist one. The distance between western countries and Poland was then clearly visible on many lifestyle indicators, including not only sports and recreation, and health care but also, for example, diet. Polish society started to adapt western lifestyles and a more positive perception of sports was found. In the 21st century, Poles perceive sport as an important element of culture and social life. Sport and sports tourism have become a distinctive feature of the middle class and the fashion for running has become very visible, and not only at the place of residence<sup>13-16</sup>.

The physical activity of Poles in the last two decades has increased. Mass sporting events participation like running can be considered a sport activity whose development

could be due to the advance in post-materialism and the development of individualization processes that have characterized western societies in recent years<sup>4</sup>. Positive changes began to be noticed after the political transformations in Poland in 1989. Previously, Poles were a nation that, in contrast to Western societies, was characterized by much lower physical activity, nevertheless, social, cultural, and economic factors led to an increase. Today, the way of spending free time of Poles, using the available infrastructure and improving the quality of life allows them to emphasize their social status<sup>17</sup>.

## **Material and Methods**

The available scientific literature on popularizing participation in mass sports events around the world, prompts reflection on Polish society and its approach to recreational sports.

The main goal of the research is to show that the socio-cultural tendency that made the development and growth in mass sporting events participation in Poland possibly has been influenced by two general trends:

1. the spread of post-materialist values that have incited changes in the prevailing cultural tendencies,
2. the massive increase of individualization processes, where beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of individuals are increasingly based on personal decisions and depend less on tradition.

## **Super League Triathlon in Poznan – research design**

Inspiring of Super League Triathlon organised in two cycles (qualifying and championship) in Poznan, we conducted the pilot research in 2018 during this event. As part of the first, triathletes (amateurs and professionals) compete for points enabling them to start in championship events. The championship cycle was the start of the world's top triathlete, in one of the most prestigious locations in the world. As part of the longest 4-day triathlon festival in Poland, there were also amateur starts at three individual distances (112.99 km, 56.5 km and 28.25 km), as well as a team start at a distance of 56.5 km.



Source: <https://biegowe.pl/2018/04/5450.html>

The research tool was a questionnaire firstly used by the authors during the half-marathon in Poznan, where the division of motives developed by Freyer and Gross was the basis for studying motives for participation in sporting events. The pilot studies during the Super League Triathlon were the first step in adapting the abbreviated version of this questionnaire at events such as triathlon.



Source: <https://biegowe.pl/2018/04/5450.html>

Participant data was collected during the Super League Triathlon in 2018 (29 of June – 1 of July 2018) in which both amateur and professional triathletes participate. The research, a diagnostic face-to-face survey using a standardized interview technique, was conducted among athletes who completed a questionnaire and all of whom participated in the event voluntarily. The results amount to more than 100% because, for each group of motives, participants could tick more than one answer (maximum 3). Descriptive statistics (percentages, means and standard deviations) were calculated for all variables.

## Results

A sample of 122 surveyed amateur athletes: 74 men and 48 women respondents. They were (n = 122) mainly between 41-50 years old (36.88%), 36-40 years old (35.24%), and 25-36 years-old (15.57%). Respondents with higher education constituted the vast majority (81.96%) and most of them (76.22%) were professionally active. The socio-demographic characteristics of respondents are presented below (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Male	%	Female	%	All	%
	N = 74	60.66	N = 48	39.34	N = 122	100
<b>Age</b>						
18<	2	2.70	0	0.00	2	1.63
19–24	4	5.40	1	2.08	5	4.09
25–35	11	14.86	8	16.66	19	15.57
36–40	20	27.02	23	47.91	45	36.88
41-50	31	47.29	14	29.16	43	35.24
51-70	6	8.10	2	4.16	8	6.55
<b>Education Level</b>						
Primary education	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Secondary education	4	5.41	2	4.16	6	4.92
Incomplete higher education	7	9.46	9	18.75	16	13.11
Completed higher education	63	85.13	37	77.08	100	81.96
<b>Employment Status</b>						
School pupil (<18 years)	2	2.70	0	0.00	2	1.63
University student	8	0.00	6	6.90	14	11.47

Professionally active	61	82.43	32	66.67	93	76.22
Unemployed	3	4.05	6	12.50	9	7.37
Pensioner	2	2.70	2	4.16	4	3.27

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Among the surveyed men (n = 74), the majority of runners were aged between 41 and 50 (47.29). Men with higher education constituted the vast majority – 85.13%. A greater percentage of them (82.43%) were professionally active. Most of the women were aged 36–40 (36.88%) and 41-50 (35.24%). Among the surveyed women 81.96% completed higher education level and over 76.22% of female participants were professionally active.

Only 38% (47) of the researched people have children, but (what is interesting) more men (38 – 51.35%) than women (9 – 18.75%) participated in the triathlon have children. It is very interesting and allows us to draw a preliminary conclusion that, however, triathlon as a sport discipline requires a lot of availability from the athlete. Workouts are time consuming and travels are strictly associated with taking part in competitions. Perhaps that is why fewer women who train triathlon have children. Our research shows that young women take part in triathlons. They are most often responsible for caring, especially with the youngest children.

More than 62% (62,4%) declares high living conditions which gives them the possibility to spend a lot of time on training with professional training plan, diet etc. to participate in sporting events. Almost half of them (51.64%) declare that they start from taking part in running events like marathons. The rest of the researched people started these preparations because: they like sports and challenges (28.68%), they like to swim and ride a bike (14.75%) or for other reasons not given (4.92%). They participate in triathlon to test themselves (48,2%), to reach strong emotions (47,8%), to do something prestigious (52,4%), to higher their social status (35,2%). It follows that the life model of the research people allows them to train intensively and to subordinate their lives to diet and sports activities. Starting a triathlon requires a lot of time and preparation. Pilot studies confirm the thesis that athletes profess post-materialistic values.

## Conclusions



The research presented in this article is based on the assumption that the sociocultural changes that made the development and rise in participating in sporting events like half marathons, marathons and triathlons possibly have been influenced by two trends. The first is the proliferation of post-materialist values that have signified a change in the predominant cultural tendencies. The second was the massive rise of individualization processes, where individuals' beliefs, attitudes and behaviours are increasingly based on decisions of a personal nature and depend less on tradition and social institutions. Both trends have developed in a context where there are more free time and a progressive consolidation of the division between work and leisure.

The first triathlon took place in 1974 in the United States. Ten years later the first triathlon took place in Poland (City of Poznan). As an Olympic discipline, triathlon appeared for the first time at the Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000 and consists of 1.5 km of swimming, 40 km of cycling and 10 km of running<sup>18</sup>. According to Roethenbaugh<sup>19</sup> research, on average, 30% of participants in triathlon competitions are women. The most numerous age category is the range in both men and women 34-40. As much as 86% of triathletes have higher education, 70% of participants are married and 60% have children. The richest triathlonists constitute the largest percentage. Most of the respondents come from the most developed countries. Taking into account all the possible ironman distances to the sprint, at the end of 2014 there were 2.3 million active triathlonists in the world. On average, this number increases by around 10% each year. Most triathlonists come from: USA (575,000), Australia, Great Britain (130,000), Germany, France and Japan. Of these countries, active triathlonists are in the range of 100,001 - 600,000. In the next range 10.001 - 100.000 there are such countries as: Portugal, Spain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, New Zealand, Japan, Taiwan. Poland ranges from 1.001 to 10,000 active triathlonists. As you can easily see, the most developed countries have the most triathlonists. In order to match the US or UK in proportion to the population, Poland would have to have around 70,000 triathlonists<sup>19</sup>.

City of Poznan has excellent conditions for the organization of a triathlon. Since 2013, world-class competitions have been held there. Organizers gives a unique opportunity for triathlon enthusiasts from all over Poland to start in one event with the best competitors in the world. This event fits very well within the framework of social

and cultural changes, ways of thinking about the quality of life and approach to health, including social health.

Pilot studies (Super League Triathlon Poznan) prove that participation in such a mass sport event like triathlon brings together people with high quality of life, conscious training plan and expenses related to the equipment. The theories of cultural change and individualization claim, the practice of mass sporting events participation is more widespread among younger individuals and those with a higher educational level.

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