

## Eugeniusz Piasecki's concept of winter sports in view of modern PE objectives and the Olympic idea

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The article aims to initiate a wider discussion on the development of Polish sport in association with physical education of children and youth, which would take into account the achievements of its pioneers. The study focuses first on the pioneering concept of a Polish physical education theorist, Eugeniusz Piasecki, based on application of different sports, including winter disciplines, in the physical education of children and adults. Piasecki's approach was not only innovative but it also involved many valid postulates in the context of current proposals to promote sports lifestyles in society. The realization of these postulates is hardly possible without the proper involvement of physical education. Focusing on gaining expected results in his pedagogical practice, Piasecki did not limit possible problem solutions to his own initiatives, but first analysed different approaches to physical education in Europe and North America and then compared them with the situation of physical education and sport in Poland. The analysis of Piasecki's concept indicates the still current but only partially implemented proposals for development of sport in its relationship with the Olympic idea in Poland.

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### What is already known on this topic?

The development of contemporary sport in Poland associated, among others, with Olympic achievements, constantly improving standings in the Olympics and the acknowledgment of Polish Olympic heritage are the core issues in physical culture sciences in Poland. Eugeniusz Piasecki's historical proposal to propagate winter sports in Poland definitely falls within this area of research. The confrontation of the past views with the current results in winter sports may contribute to the development of more efficient activities in the fields of physical education and sport.

### Introduction

The nearly century-long history of Winter Olympics that began with the 1924 Olympics in Chamonix [1] is a convenient opportunity to provide various analyses of the development of the Olympic movement and its current position in particular countries. The past and present successes of Poles in the Olympic winter sports such as cross-country and downhill skiing, ski jumping, snowboarding, biathlon, Nordic combined, speed and figure skating and ice hockey illustrate well the Polish contributions [2, 3] to the development of the Olympic movement. They are also opportunities to reflect on Eugeniusz Piasecki's views from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century regarding popularization of winter sports in Poland. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>, i.e. the time of Piasecki's professional activities dedicated to the study of physical education

and its relationships with sport, witnessed numerous sports and tourism initiatives. With time they evolved into well-organized sports, including winter sports. It is worth noting that as early as 1869 the first Polish skating organisation was founded in Lwów, which became highly significant for the development of speed and figure skating, as well as ice hockey. Its foundation was preceded by an increased interest in this form of activity, which was manifested by the creation of skating centres in Austrian controlled Lwów and Kraków. In 1865, the first ice rink was opened in the Łazienki Park in Warsaw, and in 1908 the European championships in figure skating were hosted for the first time in the Polish capital. In 1921, the Polish Skating Association was founded, and a year later the first national championships in single and pair figure skating were held. At the same time, ice hockey had been developing. A public demonstration of this sport took place in 1905 in Lwów. Bandy hockey and ice hockey were played as well since 1910 and 1912, respectively. In 1923, the Organizing Committee of the Polish Ice Hockey Federation was founded, and two years later the Polish Ice Hockey Federation was established in Warsaw. In 1918 the reactivated skiing associations and clubs founded an organizing committee during a tourism congress in Kraków, which led to the emergence of the Polish Skiing Association in Zakopane in 1919. In 1930 the Luge Section of the Polish Skiing Association began its activities. The dynamic emergence of winter sports associations in Poland coincided with the two Winter Olympics (Sankt Moritz in 1928 and Lake Placid in 1932) in which Polish athletes took part despite the fact that the organization of winter sports in Poland was still in its nascent stage. Sport activities, which also involved defining the concept of sport and its relations with physical education, were subject to constant verification, as reflected in Władysław Osmolski's works [4, 5].

Eugeniusz Piasecki's pioneering proposals were not only subject to academic debate but were aimed at the promotion and development of winter sports in Poland. Because of the necessity to implement specific institutional solutions in the area of sport, they were often innovative. Benefitting from applications from other countries renowned for their national sports achievements required from the Polish precursors new ways of action in order to strengthen this form of physical culture.

Eugeniusz Piasecki's activities related to the development of physical education and sport in Poland deserve high recognition, especially in view of his published works.

According to Professor Kazimierz Toporowicz, the author of a book on Piasecki's life and scholarly activity, the number of the works published by Eugeniusz Piasecki until 1946 (a year before his death) amounted to 270 [6]. By 1904 he had published 54 works in Poland and abroad on themes such as physical education, sport, hygiene, games and activities, gymnastic systems from the point of view of contemporary medicine and exercise physiology, as well as the situation of physical education in England, Japan and Scandinavia. Piasecki's views on physical education were appreciated not only in Poland but also abroad, e.g. in 1908 Piasecki's *The Principles of Physical Education* published in Kraków in 1904 was translated into Czech [7]. Piasecki's other books dedicated only to physical education included *History of Physical Education* (1925) and *Outline of Physical Education* (1931). Around 1904 Piasecki's interests in the sport development, including winter sports, become highlighted. He associated the development of winter sports in Poland with the Tatra resort town of Zakopane, which he considered the potential national main winter sports centre. This is confirmed in Piasecki's speech on Zakopane's role in the physical rebirth of the Polish nation as well as in his numerous articles on winter plays and sports published in "Przegląd Zakopiański".

### **Winter sports and physical education objectives in Poland at the beginning of the twentieth century**

#### *Winter sports*

In his *Principles of Physical Education* Eugeniusz Piasecki dedicated much space to winter sports [7]. In the introduction to winter sports he explains that "We are here deliberately departing from the classification of sports based not on the movement form but on the season of the year (...), because, in this way, we want to emphasize the necessity of expanding the programme of outdoor winter activities in our climate" [7]. By adopting this approach, Piasecki stressed the need for a gradual adaptation of the body to all climate changes and indicated the health benefits of movement in the open air in winter. However, in his answer to the question whether people would willingly undertake such physical exercise, he stated that the most common form of outdoor physical games "... is the ice rink; while only the wealthy can afford riding sleighs with more or less shapely steeds for recreation or hunting" [7]. Nonetheless, it was the ice rink fun "as a game truly ludic and lively at the same time", as one of

sports undertaken by the Poles in winter in those times, which was a type of mass movement participation. Also, ice rink skating was very popular among girls and women. Yet, according to Piasecki, it should not be the most popular winter leisure activity. He made a revision of winter sports popular in other countries in terms of their salubrious, utilitarian and educational values: "In countries with the climate similar to ours, people cultivate a variety of fun activities with all those virtues assigned to the most beautiful games and bravest tourism" [7]. As for the ice rink, Piasecki observed that like "in England, Scotland and North America, it should not be a place for aimless running (...)", but it ought to serve "as a field for (...) games such as hockey, rink ball and curling" [7]. In his opinion, it is reasonable to propagate skating as an attractive physical game of great importance to health. He stated furthermore that in skating one should take into consideration its educational aspects and transform it into "a travelling sport or a physical game". According to Piasecki, the conditions in Poland favoured, to a greater degree, the development of the latter. Therefore, in the case of games on ice, one should distinguish between running on skates (a very good exercise for keeping fit) as well as various tossing sports. In Piasecki's view a good example of a tossing play on ice was curling – a game of the country folk: "In its simplified form, popular among the country folk in the vicinity of Germany, this game is perfectly suitable to be popularized as a folk play among peasants. The opportunity which curling gives to the arm of a robust peasant, its simplicity and firmness, are highly valuable" [7]. The then curling rules, originated in Scotland, differed from the rules of present-day curling: "Its aim is to powerfully throw a stone at the target, as close as possible to the centre, in order to knock out the rival's pucks from strategic positions. The number of stones at the end of the game within the range of the circle determines the victory" [7]. Eugeniusz Piasecki classified ice hockey and rink-ball as games for townspeople since "those games are much more lively, develop the mind and are available to anyone regardless of age and sex" [7]. The proposed games used the rules of football. In rink-ball, a big leather ball was used as opposed to a small cricket ball used in ice hockey.

Another winter sport which, according to Piasecki, should be propagated in Poland was skiing, popular at that time in Norway, Finland and Canada: "The freedom of movement, the ability to get to hard-to-reach places,

plenty of opportunities to develop courage and acuteness, strength and agility – these are the virtues which prove that the brave Frijtof Nansen did not exaggerate naming this sport the king of sports. And, despite all that, skiing in our country is merely at the stage of isolated trials – a stage which so many profitable projects are unable to go beyond. Those trials clearly revealed that our terrain was quite appropriate for the development of this sport, and the winter trips to Mount Chomiak and Mount Hoverla reported in the Tatra Society's annuals give credit to our tourists' endurance and courage" [7]. In Piasecki's opinion, in terms of skiing equipment, the best pattern of skiing promotion in Poland, next to the Finnish, Lappish and Canadian models, would be the Norwegian one: "Each of those countries has produced a different sort of skis, yet the Norwegian ones best suit our conditions". He then argued: "The reader probably knows the descriptions of these famous races on snow in the area of Christiania, in which dozens of skiers participate, and in which performing jumps into the depths of 20-30 metres is not uncommon" [7].

Another popular winter sport in those times was the Sparkstotting (winter bike) – a popular tobogganing sport in Scandinavia: "It is a light wooden luge with long poles similar in shape to those used as supports for skaters who learn their first steps on ice; the tourist, in the upright position, leans his hands on the crossbar, one leg on the chosen pole and his other leg booted in spurs, and bounces off the compacted snow" [7]. Piasecki treats luge in its classic form as the simplest winter sport. However, he indicates the terrain's conditions enabling luge practice, and the contemporary modern luge sport devices ("Abroad, this is a sport mostly cultivated on racetracks arranged by the government or the municipality, sometimes artificial ones") and enumerates solutions applied in Canada and Switzerland. He states, among others, that in Canada, "there are famous racetracks in Saratoga (900 metres of length, 44 metres of height, costing 22,000 Polish zloty), Quebec and Montreal", and that the game participants "carry on their backs a light sled in order to reach the track's peak, jump on the sled and bravely slide down the sloping mountainside, racing with the other competitors and showing admirable agility" [7]. He further explained that "In Switzerland and the Giant Mountains, where the mountainous terrain enables developing it as a half-tourist outdoor sport" the government "lends the highroad for the sled race, and the four-kilometre distance is travelled by brave

sliders in less than four minutes; sometimes tourists from abroad compete with them, mainly Englishmen, who had pried their art of agility” [7]. Finally, he states that luge can be successfully practiced in Poland. He writes: “The surroundings of both capitals abound in good conditions, while in the Carpathian Mountains, we have large spaces as if created for this (...). Zakopane is the Polish Davos and it should not be left behind its Swiss counterpart” [7].

Piasecki completes the characterization of free exercises with a description of winter sports and methodological exercises that originated from gymnastics. Beside the analysed winter sports, in this part of *The Principles* he also takes into consideration such sports as football, cycling, horse riding, tennis, rowing, athletics, swimming and dancing. Piasecki would focus on the issue of Polish sport and its connections with physical education<sup>1</sup> many times after 1904.

#### *Physical education objectives*

In *The Principles* Eugeniusz Piasecki argues for the need of clear specification of physical education objectives. In his opinion, they ought to be considered in relation to the impact that exercise can have on the “physical and spiritual personality of the youth”. Piasecki pointed to the positive results of exercise for the proper functioning of the basic systems of the human body and for the development of the mind and character of youth. Sport exercises, for instance related to winter sports, also play an important role in the realization of physical education purposes. Piasecki attached great significance to the appropriate identification of health and muscle strength, and claimed that in health activities the strength of the muscles should be improved, yet never excessively. He also believed that health, as the existential condition of human beings as well as societies, ought to be the main objective of physical education. More than two decades later, while discussing the issue of physical education objectives in one of his publications [8], he reminded the readers of the meaning of values of the human spiritual culture such as truth, beauty and

goodness, and then, from the same perspective, he attempted at defining the aims of physical education. Piasecki distinguished between the physical objectives referring to the strengthening of the pupil’s health and physical fitness, and the spiritual objectives referring to the pupil’s prowess and beauty. In both cases he described the enumerated aims in great detail.

In terms of mutual relationships between health and fitness, Eugeniusz Piasecki confirmed the assumption that the work on physical fitness served the pupil’s health, unless the pupil’s body’s physiological capabilities were exceeded. He proposed viewing pupils’ fitness development from the perspective of basic didactic postulates. For this purpose, he evoked referred to didactic materialism (providing pupils with a wide repertoire of sport movements) and didactic formalism (“The formal benefits of physical abilities concerning the detailed postures and movements (...) are expressed with a greater ease of completing a new task by a pupil educated in such a way”). Piasecki appreciated those standpoints as equally fruitful for the pupil, explaining that both a skier and a climber would be well prepared for undertaking practically any of those sports. The objectives of physical education proposed by him, which were related to prowess and beauty, were categorized according to psychological purposes. Prowess embraces such fundamental elements as the time of a conscious reaction, will power, courage, discipline, leadership and mastery of instincts (for example, during skiing contests, in order to satisfy the desire of competition). The sport’s role is then to appropriately form each of the enumerated pupils’ dispositions. The typical situations for sports always create an occasion for shaping the societal attitudes among pupils. Beauty can be, in turn, analysed through the aesthetic prism of the pupil’s body posture and sporty movements. In each of those cases, he evoked the heritage of ancient Hellada. The right pattern of harmony regarding the body posture was then recognized in the figures of ancient pentathletes, while the sport movements of participants in the ancient Olympics used to be recognized as the formula of movement beauty.

This clear link between the stated physical education objectives (in their personal layer) and the ancient Olympics heritage made by Piasecki seems to be a significant argument for his input in the development of Polish physical education and sport with reference to the Olympic concept of Pierre de Coubertin from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>1</sup> See „Piłka nożna polska. Przyczynek do kwestii wychowania fizycznego narodowego” *Ruch* 1906, R. 1. 14-16; „Ćwiczenia narciarskie dla uczniów szkół średnich” 1909, Muzeum, r. 25, vol. 1; „O przyszłości sportu” *Wychowanie Fizyczne* 1929, R. 11; „Sport a wychowanie” *Wychowanie Fizyczne* 1934, R. 15; „Olimpijski Kongres Pedagogiczny w Pradze w dn. 31 V – 5 VI 1925” *Wychowanie Fizyczne* 1925, R. 6; z. 2, 3, 4; „Sport olimpijski a wychowanie (...)” *Przegląd Pedagogiczny* 1936, R. 55, 16 [6].

**The development of the Olympic idea**

The directions of development of winter sports in relation with physical education proposed by Piasecki were crucial for the growth of the modern Olympic idea in Poland. Regardless of the natural and spontaneous interest in the genesis of the Olympic movement and physical education in Poland and abroad, many contemporary researchers recall the past, global and national, determinants of Olympism. In this light a complete evaluation of the heritage of physical culture and the prediction of its further development should be made. The legitimacy of this approach in physical culture sciences has been confirmed, among others, by Józef Lipiec in his work on the Olympic philosophy [9], by Wojciech Lipoński in his history of world sports [10], and by Ryszard Wasztyl in his work on the development of physical education and sport in Kraków between 1773 and 1890 [11].

Similar approaches can be found in the works of foreign authors, who refer to the origins of Olympism in their assessments of the influence of such phenomena as globalization on the modern Olympic movement. John T. Powell [12], for example, discusses the significance of current Olympism. Deane Neubauer [13] studies mutual relationships between globalization and the growth of modern and the Olympic Games. According to him, the complex dimensions of dynamic globalization such as the removal of time and space barriers, migration and urbanization, enrichment and distribution of goods, media transformation, market and consumption, and finally, axiological issues, are reflected in the Olympic idea. Piervincenzo Bondonio and Nadia Campaniello [14] from Italy evaluate the Winter Olympic Games in Torino in 2006 in light of current challenges. Taking into account the problems of fulfilling the aims of this event, they both indicate the areas in which positive changes have occurred thanks to the Olympic Games, and they try to identify the failures of the event. They give examples of firm effects of the organization of the Olympic Games in the context of the ongoing changes in Torino and the surrounding region. At the same time, they point to the economic foundations of the organization of the games and the promotion of the city and the region by the international media. In their opinion, the undertaken analysis should not only concentrate on the benefits, but also look into the future of sport and the Olympic movement.

The analysis of the past and current Olympics in light of pragmatic theory (as opposed to empirical theory that describes and explains phenomena, pragmatic theory implements and justifies adopted solutions in Olympic sports) which reveals a positive approach to amateur sport is for Robert Paddick [15] a return to the classic amateurism in contemporary sport. The history of the Olympic movement reveals its core social determinants and allows postulating solutions for its future. Yoan Grosset and Michael Attali [16] represent a similar approach in terms of the rather ignored concept of national views of the idea of Olympism. The authors, while analysing Coubertin's achievements in the field of Olympism promotion, stress the fact that it would have not been possible to achieve these successes without the support he had received from the French national sports movement. Grosset and Attali follow carefully the stages of the Olympic development in France in the time periods of 1908-1925, 1925-1952 and 1952-1973. They conclude that one can see the presence of mutual, international and national links between people and institutions and their impact on the growth of Olympic sport, which helps to understand the reasons for the repeatedly surprising and various cultural interactions typical for any nation. John A. Lucas [17] also indicates the moments in history that have contributed to the revitalization of the modern Olympic idea and its further development. He attaches huge significance for the practical enforcement of Coubertin's Olympic idea to his second trip to the United States in 1893, during which Coubertin faced a serious range of difficulties concerning the actual implementation of the Olympic idea. As a result of his visit to North America Coubertin intensified the undertaken efforts and finally won the support of 79 delegates during the second Olympic congress held at Sorbonne in Paris in 1894. Even if Lucas's conclusions seem quite original, they do not change the fact that in the history of Olympism, a significant role is played by the discovery of the unique events that influences its local and global growth. An Argentinian researcher, Cesar R. Torres [18], focuses on investigations in regard to sport and education. He mentions the pioneering achievements in sport development in South America by an Argentinian pedagogue, Jose B. Zubiaur, whom Coubertin invited to join the International Olympic Committee in 1894. Torres also reveals Coubertin's approach to the inclusion of sport and physical education into school curricula in order to shape pupils' physical, moral and spiritual excellence.

The above considerations regarding the origins of contemporary Olympics supported by the cited works show that the formulation and the global acceptance of the universal aims of Olympism have not solely determined the practical realization of its assumptions. Equally important was the approach to physical education and sport presented by the youth in particular countries interested in the Olympic idea. One of such countries was Poland.

### Conclusions

The aforementioned views of some Polish and foreign authors on the history and present status of the Olympic idea in sport and physical education clearly indicate the place of Olympism in physical culture sciences as part of history of physical culture. The dynamic development of the Olympic movement and its impact on physical education and sport today require other representatives of academic physical education to take a more insightful look back at the heritage of the pioneers of physical education and sport. In the Polish theory of physical education, Eugeniusz Piasecki was such a precursor, who, reckoning with the dynamic development of the Olympics, proposed practical solutions and specified further directions for the national physical education and sport, including winter sports.

The present analysis of the concepts of this renowned Polish theorist of physical education from the beginning of the twentieth century permits the following conclusions:

1. The issues discussed first by Piasecki in his *The Principles of Physical Education* (1904) and developed in his subsequent works should be utilized today to a much greater degree to reinforce the role of physical education in Poland and to combine its development with the assumptions of the contemporary Olympic movement.
2. The complementary model of physical education and sport proposed more than a hundred years ago is – in the light of contemporary physical education – still a valid argument in favour of the cooperation between physical culture forms aimed at the stimulation of pupils' physical development and those aimed at shaping societal attitudes.
3. With regard to the different factors determining the development of physical education and sport in the past and today it is worth reaching back to the pioneering studies of national authors in the discussion on mutual relationships between both forms of physical culture.

### What this study adds?

The objective of the present study was to analyze Eugeniusz Piasecki's pioneering concepts from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century regarding the promotion and organization of winter sports in Poland in terms of their application in today's physical education of the youth, physical recreation of the adults and their health and educational benefits. The study discusses Piasecki's standpoints regarding the combination of the development of Polish physical education and sport with the assumptions of the rising modern Olympism during his times. Piasecki's views matched and, in some aspects, were even ahead of standpoints represented by many foreign authors.

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