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# European societies' access to sport – the European Union actions

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**Abstract:** Sport is gaining importance both as a social and economic phenomenon, contributing greatly to the strategic goals of the European Union. Sport and physical activity stimulate important values such as team spirit, solidarity, tolerance and the fair play principle. Not only is sport important for improving European citizens' health, but it also has an educational dimension and plays a social and cultural role. The European Union is keen to follow the various challenges facing sport in Europe and deals with these issues on a regular basis by launching a number of initiatives (e.g. by promoting a slogan "Sport for all") and encouraging member states to take various actions. However, sport is facing new threats and challenges that have emerged and intensified especially recently, such as doping, racism, violence, corruption, but also giving up systematic sports activity in many communities. The purpose of the article is an attempt to analyse the issues in question and to show them with reference to Poland.

**Keywords:** football, sport, European Union,

## Introduction

Sport and sports activities play an important role in the social life of the European Union, constituting an important factor in bringing people together, thereby contributing to increased social integration (Buhaş et al., 2017, 2018; Granero-Gallegos et al., 2014; Ilieş et al., 2014; Tătar et al., 2018; Kobel et al, 2015; Vella et al, 2016). Sport gains importance as a social and economic phenomenon, largely contributing to meeting EU's strategic objectives, such as solidarity and prosperity, promotion of peace,

understanding between nations and different cultures, and the upbringing of youth. The availability of sport should be guaranteed to everyone, regardless of age, social background, sexual orientation, religion, sex, disability, and thus contribute to the awakening of such values as team spirit, solidarity, tolerance, the principle of fair play, and promotion of active and healthy lifestyles. All citizens of the European Union should have access to sport; therefore, the specific needs and situations of groups which are not sufficiently represented and excluded from such access should be addressed.

### **An overview of selected activities related sport conducted by the European Union**

Already in 1966, the Council of Europe introduced the concept of “sport for all”. As Maszorek-Szymala says, “This concept was considered as advertising for sports, but it was transformed into an idea that we can combine with the notion of movement throughout life. Currently, the slogan functions in the official terminology of physical culture. It is equivalent to the notion of continuous education in a comprehensively understood system of education. The importance of physical activity in the modern world confirms participation in sport for all” (Maszorek-Szymala, 2010).

The document which first focused on the vital role of sport was the report “Citizens’ Europe” from 1985, prepared by the Adonnino Committee.<sup>1</sup> In 1991, on the basis of the announcement “The European Community and Sport”, adopted by the European Commission, the European Sport Forum was established, which worked until 2003. The Forum gathered representatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament, ministers of sport from member states, National Olympic Committees, and non-governmental sports organisations.

One of the documents facilitating access to sport for Europe’s citizens is the “European Sports Charter”, which was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 24 September 1992 (changes in 2001). Its main motto is Pierre de Coubertin’s words: “Sport is part of every man and woman’s heritage and its absence can never be compensated for” (European Commission, the White Paper on Sports, 2007). The Charter provides guidance for members of the Council of Europe on how to improve the existing legislation, shows how to develop a comprehensive framework for action in the field of sport and aims to “ensure the development of a sport based on ethical principles, safe and healthy, accessible to all, through the most widely understood cooperation and appropriate distribution of competences between government institutions and NGOs” (Urząd Komitetu Integracji Europejskiej, 2018).

According to the document, “sport is any form of physical activity which practiced, whether sporadically or in an organized way, aims to express or enhance physical fitness and well-being, to foster social bonds or to achieve results in competition at all levels, and can contribute to creating jobs and economic growth and recovery, especially in poorly developed areas” (Europejska karta sportu, 1992).

Until recently, sport was not taken into account in the European Union’s legislation and was rather treated as the so-called “soft law”, which does not have legally binding force or is weaker than the traditional law. Fortunately, in recent years there

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu>

has been a change in the perception of sport as an important factor in strengthening cooperation between member states.

The social function of sport was mentioned in the “Treaty of Amsterdam” in 1997, which emphasized its role in shaping the sense of identity and its importance in the process of bringing people together. Sport can serve as an effective tool in integrating citizens into society; it develops such capabilities and traits as teamwork, tolerance, fair competition; it plays a significant role in fighting racism and all kinds of discrimination. Increasingly, the importance of sporting activities is seen as a factor in facilitating the integration immigrants into societies and as a catalyst for intercultural dialogue.<sup>2</sup>

The document which also emphasises the important role of sport in social inclusion is the “Nice declaration on the specific characteristics of sport and its social function in Europe” (2000), which stresses women’s and men’s equal access to sports activity, according to their individual aspirations and capabilities, and which indicates the importance of sport for the development of personal talent, rehabilitation, social inclusion and solidarity in order to create a “sports family”.<sup>3</sup> The document indicates: “In our multicultural societies, sport can and must become a tool to be used in formal and non-formal learning. Account should be taken of the particular role that sport can play for young people, people with disabilities and those with less-advantaged backgrounds. Sport can also foster the integration of immigrants and foreign people into society and promote intercultural dialogue. Sport promotes a sense of shared belonging and participation in society, so that it can become an important tool for integrating immigrants. Granting access to sports facilities and promoting related activities is essential in this context in order to enable positive interaction between immigrants and the host community”.<sup>4</sup>

Among others, this document also reads:

- community programmes, such as Progress, Lifelong learning, Youth in action, Europe for citizens, as well as programmes of the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, and the European Fund for Integration, should be used with a view to deepening social inclusion and fighting against discrimination in sport;
- promotion of dialogue and exchange of the best practices in the fight against racism and xenophobia in sport should be encouraged;
- promotion of a multidisciplinary approach to the prevention of anti-social behaviour, with particular emphasis on socio-educational activities (e.g. working with fans to shape positive attitudes that eliminate violence in sport) should be encouraged;
- regular and structured cooperation between law enforcement services, sport organisations and other stakeholders should be strengthened.<sup>5</sup>

The year 2003 was designated the “European Year of People with Disabilities (EYPD)”<sup>6</sup> by the European Commission, and 2004 – “The European Year of Education through Sport” (EYES).<sup>7</sup> As part of these celebrations, many activities promoting sport were launched and various sporting events in many

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.eur-lex.europa.eu>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.eur-lex.europa.eu>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.eur-lex.europa.eu>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.eur-lex.europa.eu>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.europa.eu>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.publications.europa.eu>

European countries (Germany, France) to promote equal rights and opportunities as well as social inclusion were conducted.

In 2005, the European Commission organised a conference “The European Union and Sport: Matching Expectations” and a meeting of Experts on Equal Opportunities in Sport. The goal of the events was, among others, to draw attention to the social role of sport, to present and disseminate an example of good practice in the field of sport activity by people with disabilities and to combat gender discrimination in order to create a basis for future cooperation of member states in this area and to recommend appropriate actions at the community level.<sup>8</sup>

The European Commission’s “Common Agenda for Integration - Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union”, approved in September 2005, is part of the process of social inclusion through sport. It becomes important in its context to provide an appropriate field of action for sport and the related activities in order to develop mutual positive relations between immigrants and their host communities.<sup>9</sup> In 2006, the European Commission adopted the “Roadmap for equality between women and men. 2006 – 2010”, which details the priority areas for gender equality, including the fight against stereotypes in sport.<sup>10</sup>

Sport engages all citizens and there is no place to manifest racist and xenophobic views. In February 1999 an international network Football against Racism in Europe (FARE) was established in Vienna. Every year it organizes FARE actions week, during which football stars and fans manifest their objections to racist incidents in stadiums.<sup>11</sup>

As noted by the Polish Ministry of Sport and Tourism: “The Council of Europe has extensive achievements in the all-European cooperation in the field of sport. The CDDS – Committee for the Development of Sport operated in the Council of Europe between 1977 and 2005. However, the all-European role played by the Council of Europe has made the member states look for new, creative solutions. Based on this, European countries considered implementation of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) to be the most effective. The new system relies on the preservation of both of the existing sports conventions (the Anti-Doping Convention and the Convention on spectator violence and misbehavior at sports events and in particular at football matches), the introduction of new structures of Partial Agreement and on the creation of an appropriate mechanism for ensuring ministerial meetings. The basic documents that create the standards on which the European vision of sport is built include: the European Sports Charter (1992), the Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehavior at Sports Events and in Particular at Football Matches (1985), the Anti-Doping Convention (1990). These three documents have become a reference point for all European governments in their efforts to develop or improve policies on sport, both competitive and sport for all. To coordinate the tasks following from both Conventions, the Standing Committee on Spectator Violence during Sports Events (T-RV) and the Monitoring Group of the Anti-Doping Convention (T-DO) were appointed.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.europa.eu>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.europa.eu>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.europa.eu>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.farenet.org/campaigns/european-projects>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.msport.gov.pl>

In March 2006, the European Parliament adopted the Declaration on tackling racism in football, which condemned all forms of racism both in and outside the stadiums. Fighting racism and xenophobia is tackled by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), established in March 2007 from transforming the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC).

Promoting a healthy lifestyle through active participation in physical culture (regardless of age) is also an area in which the concept of sport is manifested. It is shown here as a factor in preventing chronic diseases and obesity. Sport attracts European citizens, most of whom regularly practice it. According to a Eurobarometer survey, “about 60% of Europeans regularly play sports in 700,000 sports clubs or outside of them, and these clubs belong to a large number of associations and federations. Most sports activities are conducted for amateurs” (Eurobarometr, 2018).

In addition, sport is treated as a specific educational tool – the time spent on sports activities at school or at university brings benefits to the health and education of many young people. Considering sport in social terms, it is necessary to mention its impact on young people. It awakens their desire for personal development and also arouses a sense of group belonging. In the European Parliament, there is the Committee on Culture, Youth and Education, which is responsible for sporting affairs and activities directly addressed to the young generation.

However, sport is also facing new threats and challenges that have emerged in European societies, such as commercial pressures, the use of young sports players, doping, racism, corruption and violence. In order to counteract the negative phenomena mentioned above, the Commission points out, in the White Paper on Sports, the following actions addressed to the member states:

(1) It is suggested that the programmes, PROGRESS, “Lifelong Learning (Erasmus+)”, “Youth in Action” and “Europe for Citizens” support activities promoting social inclusion through sport and fighting discrimination in sport, using it as a tool conducive to social inclusion, integration and equal opportunities;

(2) access to sport and sports infrastructure should be provided for people with disabilities. Specific criteria should be adopted to ensure equal access to sport for all pupils, especially children with disabilities;

(3) Access to sport should be ensured for immigrant women and women belonging to ethnic minorities; women’s access to decision-making positions in sport should be ensured;

(4) Resolute action must be taken against doping in sport, violence and racist behaviour during sporting events through exchange of experience and cooperation between international sports organisations, law enforcement agencies and others (e.g. supporters’ organisations and local authorities), and cooperate within the network “Football Against Racism in Europe” (FARE);

(5) Sport and physical education should be promoted as essential elements of high-quality education and as a means of making the school attractive and of increasing the attendance of children and young people in the classes (especially girls to help them gain self-confidence and social inclusion (European Commission, the White Paper on Sports, 2007, pp. 9-11).

## **Participation in physical culture of the European Union citizens and the citizens in Poland**

Physical activity and sport play a very important role at all stages of our lives, positively affecting health and the quality of life. There is a growing awareness in this respect in many European societies.

As Hodan notes, "physical activity as a fundamental element of physical culture takes part in raising the quality of activity in all spheres of life, creating and satisfying vital needs" (Hodan, 2002). This activity, especially determining the development of children and youth, is conducted in schools as a subject Physical Education. It is at this stage that "fashion for a healthy lifestyle" and "fashion for physical activity" in adult life it is formed in the young generation.

According to the European Union guidelines from 2008, "Physical Education in schools is the most widely available source of promotion of physical activity among children and adolescents" (Wytyczne Unii Europejskiej dotyczące aktywności fizycznej, 2008). Physical Education (PE) is a compulsory subject in European schools; however, similarly to Poland, it is considered to be less important than other subjects. In many countries, there are different recommendations for the length of such classes (e.g. in the school year 2011/2012 schools in France realized the yearly PE lessons in the amount of 108 hours, while in Ireland only 37 hours), so an insufficient number of hours is devoted to these classes. The most popular sporting disciplines practiced in European schools during PE classes include in the following order: team games (25% of PE time), athletics and gymnastics (15%), and music-movement exercises (10%) and swimming (10%), health education (from 4 to 15%).<sup>13</sup> Research also points to some still worrying phenomena in this regard: decreasing interest in physical activity among children and adolescents, thereby a declining level of physical fitness of the younger generation.

Unfortunately, this phenomenon concerns not only the young generation, but also the population of adults – EU citizens. This phenomenon is intensifying from year to year, which is confirmed by research conducted in 2004 and 2009 by the Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2004 and 2010) on representative groups of 1000 people from each country. Below selected results are presented, based on the data:

- 2004 – Eurobarometer 213/62.0 "The Citizens of the European Union and Sport", a study conducted on citizens of 25-member states;
- 2009 – Eurobarometer 334/72.3 "Sport and Physical Activity", a study conducted on citizens of 27-member states.

The first one relates to the frequency of practising sports and taking up physical effort. In 2004, 38% of all the surveyed indicated that they were practicing sports at least once a week, while in 2009 such responses amounted to 40%.

The study also shows the motivation for sports, declared by citizens of the EU countries (including Poland). The changes that took place in Poland after 1998 not only concerned economic or social transformations, but also those in the fields of physical culture, sport, recreation and leisure time, tourism, active lifestyle. This resulted in definite changes, especially stemming from the patterns in this respect copied from the societies of the developed countries. There was a dynamic development of local

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu>

communities, focused on sport and all types of physical activity, associations promoting sport, associations of physical culture, organizations, clubs, etc. Therefore, such phenomena should result in positive changes in the activity of Poles. Unfortunately, the Eurobarometer surveys do not support this anticipated trend.

**Table 1.** Comparison of the motivation for sport, as indicated by the surveyed population from countries of the European Union and Poland, in 2004 and 2009 (%)

Source: Own study based on the European Commission 2004 and 2010

2004 (25 EU countries)			2009 (27 EU countries)		
Motives	EU	Poland	Motives	EU	Poland
Improved health status	78	75	Improved health status	61	62
Improved physical condition	46	68	Improved physical condition	41	40
Need to relax	43	27	Need to relax	39	22
Need for fun	39	32	Need for fun	31	25
Spending time with friends	31	19	Improved physical appearance	24	17
Increased self-esteem	24	14	Improved physical fitness	24	11
Meeting new people	19	12	Weight control	24	11
Achieving the planned goals	18	15	Spending time with friends	22	8
Acquiring new skills	16	16	Anti-ageing	15	8
Building personality	15	21	Increased self-esteem	10	7
Sense of rivalry	15	15	Acquiring new skills	6	5
Integration into society (among others, assistance for people with disabilities)	10	6	Sense of rivalry	6	4
Getting to know other cultures	9	6	Meeting new people	5	2
Other	1	1	Integration into society (among others, assistance for people with disabilities)	3	2
			Getting to know other cultures	2	2
			Other	8	5

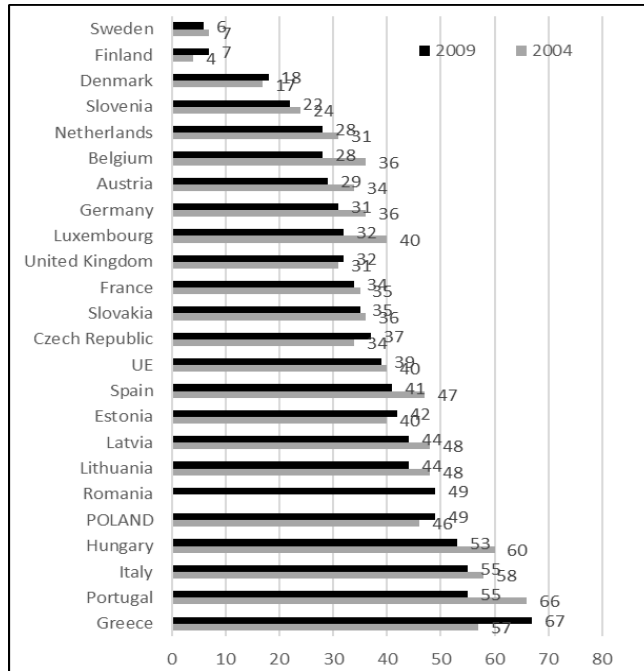
The main reasons why the subjects practiced sports (both from the European Union countries and from Poland, in 2004 and 2009) were, in particular, the need to improve the health status and physical condition as well as the need for relaxation and fun. In the 2009 survey, there were also completely new reasons and motives inclining EU citizens to practise sports: weight control (24%) and anti-ageing (15%), while such motives as achieving the planned goals (18%) and building personality (15%) were missing.

Another study addressed the problem of not taking up sports activities by the European Union citizens.

According to the figure above, it appears that in the 27 examined countries (in relation to the phenomenon of not taking up physical activity by the inhabitants), the most negative results were recorded, among others, in Portugal (decrease in activity by 11% in the compared period), Luxembourg (by 8%), Belgium (by 8%) and Hungary (by 7%).

During the period in question, there was also an increase in the interest in sport among residents of some EU countries, such as Denmark and the UK (an increase of 1%), Estonia (2%), Poland, Finland, the Czech Republic (3%), and Greece (10%).

Also the reasons for not undertaking sports activity were examined.



**Figure 1.** Percentage of people declaring lack of sports activity in selected European countries, comparison of data from 2004 and 2009 (%)

Source: Own study based on the European Commission 2004 and 2010

**Table 2.** Selected reasons for not practicing sport by the surveyed population (%)

Source: Own study based on the European Commission 2004 and 2010

Reasons	2004		2009	
	EU	Poland	EU	Poland
Lack of time	34	36	45	46
Lack of interest in sport	25	26	24	20
High costs associated with practising sports activity	4	8	5	7
No access to sports infrastructure in the nearest neighbourhood	3	6	3	5

The most important reasons for not practicing sports (both for the citizens of the European Union and for Poles in 2004 and 2009) was the lack of time (this reason was indicated as the most important in the following years), lack of interest in sport, too high costs associated with sport activity and lack of access to sports infrastructure in the nearest neighbourhood.

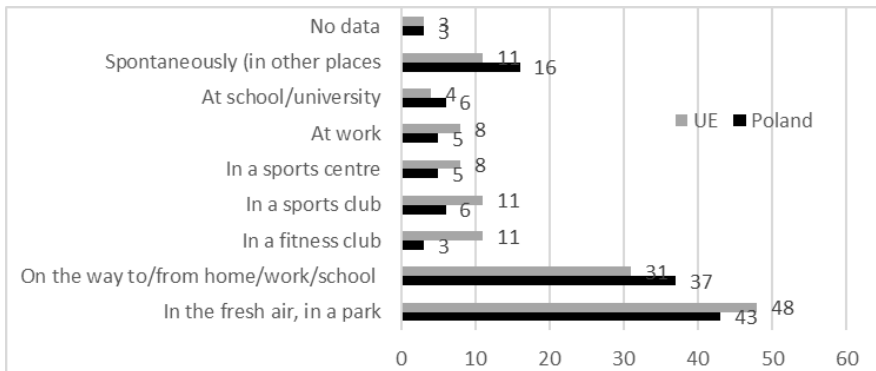
Positive aspects of physical recreation are widely known, but in Poland many people still irregularly participate in recreational physical activities (cf. the results above). Drabik points to the most common reasons for Poles giving up physical activity: “lack of time, lack of motivation and progress, small influence of participants on the exercise program, too high costs, too much distance from the venue, excess body weight, smoking tobacco, high risk of injury, and lack of awareness of the importance of movement for health” (Drabik, 2003).

Unfortunately, in our country, the term “sport” is associated more as a sport achievement, sporting competition, combat, while in Western countries this term means



all physical activity, also at leisure time. Not participating in physical activity by Poles can result, among others, from a lack of leisure habits which are shaped at an early age, e.g. by school. According to the author, this is where one should see the adverse attitudes of Poles to the idea of sports activity.

Places where EU and Polish citizens practise sport were also studied



**Figure 2.** Places of practicing sports by European Union and Polish citizens

Source: Own study based on the European Commission 2004 and 2010

For EU residents, places where they practice sports activities the most often are outdoor places, among others, parks (48%), on the way to or from home, work, school (31%) and sports and fitness clubs (11% each). For Polish residents, such places also include those located in the open air (43%), places on the way to or from home, work, school (37%) and the fact that they practise sport spontaneously (16%).

### **EU projects promoting sport that are implemented in Poland – selected examples**

At the same time, the EU cooperates and supports many projects and programmes promoting sport among European societies and encourages sport and physical activity through a variety of political initiatives in the field of education and training, including through the development of social and civic competences. Below there are some examples of such activities in Poland.<sup>14</sup>

#### **1) The Lifelong Learning Programme (Erasmus +)**

Among others, the main objective of the program is to promote volunteering and active civic attitude through sport (team membership, respecting fair play rules, adhering to game rules, respect for others, solidarity and discipline, and organizing amateur non-profit and volunteer-based sports clubs (European Commission, the White Paper on Sports, 2007).

In Poland, this program was implemented, among others, as part of the Grundtvig Partnership Project, “European Women of the Centre of Life” (2009-2013) by the Zielona Góra University of the Third Age. It was coordinated by Ost-West-Europaisches Frauen Netzwerk e.V. from Berlin and an organization from Latvia. 400 women participated in sport and recreation activities in Zielona Gora.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.tenissuu.com/frse/docs/raport>

## 2) "Euro for Sport" project

This nationwide project (2007-2013) was launched by the Ministry of Regional Development and the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. "The development of the European dimension of sport is done by promoting fairness and accessibility in sport competition and in cooperation between organisations responsible for sport".<sup>15</sup> The main objective was to present opportunities for financing sports-related activities from the European Union funds. Participants in workshops and seminars included athletes with disabilities, sports club representatives, sports activists, representatives of sports and recreational organisations and representatives of local governments.

## 3) "The European Sports Week"

Promotional activities in this area are conducted by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Poland, which has been involved in this project since 2015. This is the European Commission's initiative to promote sport and physical activity across Europe. "This all-European campaign realised with the #BeActive slogan aims to encourage citizens to an active lifestyle during the celebrations of the Week and throughout the whole year".<sup>16</sup>

## 4) Projects conducted by Social Welfare Centres

Activities in the field of sport, recreation and tourism "can definitely contribute to the actions including the so far marginalised people in the normal life of society" (Olszewski-Strzyżowski, 2018, p.19). Such actions concerning, among others, the unemployed, the homeless, large families, children and youth, the elderly and the disabled are successfully carried out by the Centres. Some of the recent activities in the field of popularization of sport among persons in their charge with a use of EU funds were implemented in 2008–2015. According to Olszewski-Strzyżowski, who studied 2480 such centres in Poland, 341 of them conducted such programs. Out of the total number of 1652 programs, 150 were implemented in the field of sport and recreation, and 140 in the field of tourism. Most of them were sports and recreation activities (e.g., gym, swimming, sailing, or football), sports festivals, and sport-integration events. Especially seniors, unemployed people and families with children were the most numerous groups participating in such activities (Olszewski-Strzyżowski, 2018, pp.134-135).

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