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Social Footprint of the Leisure Running Boom in Poland

Abstract: The paper examines the problem of the social output of the leisure running boom as a relatively durable phenomenon of nowadays global scope. The concept of the "social footprint" to describe the social consequences and impact of the phenomenon of interest, is proposed, developed and implemented. Analysis conducted is focused on Poland as an exemplary country under social, political and economic modernization. The first two decades of the 21st century constitute the time frame of the study performed. The collected and analyzed empirical data allow us to claim that the running boom contributed to the progress of Polish modernization in the form of reconstruction of social structure (macro-social level), generation of social capital, strengthening of the position of local government, modernization of rural and urban landscape in social and spatial dimension (mezzo-social level) and changes in gender roles (micro-social level).

Keywords: recreation, leisure, running boom, social footprint, Polish modernization

Introduction

This paper addresses the social consequences of the running boom as a durable phenomenon of high popularity of leisure running, manifested inter alia by eager participation in running events on different distances (not only marathons), but not reduced to those events and concerning also everyday running. An understanding of the term "running event" as "a sports competition open to amateurs where at least one of the disciplines is running for a specific distance (measured in units of length or time)" (Stempień, Mielczarek, Tokarski 2021: 28) is employed here.

The running boom is a phenomenon of global scope and remains a subject of studies by representatives of numerous scientific disciplines. Humanistically and socially oriented authors usually analyze changes in the intensity of the phenomenon over time, extract profiles of amateur runners from the researches and consider runners' motivation. Less efforts are addressed to investigations of the cultural and social origins of the phenomenon, while analyses of the actual social significance and impact of the running boom are far from forthcoming. In general, the running boom is "justified" on the basis of the large-scale health, psychological and possibly economic benefits associated with widespread physical activity. It seems, however, that the more general question of the social outcomes of the running boom is legitimate, given the extent and persistence of this phenomenon. Thus, it can be said that the problem in this case is the incomplete realization of this function of sociology of physical culture, which Krawczyk (1993; see also Cynarski 2008: 18–19)

describes as axiological-accultural, which means shaping our thinking about sports and developing the sociological imagination, indispensable for a proper understanding of the meaning of sports activities.

The aim of the paper will be introducing the idea of "social footprint," applying it to the problem of the running boom and testing it in case of Poland as a country under social, political and economic modernization in which running boom may be observed. This way, I would like to summarize and theoretize my several years of research on the running boom in Poland.

Running Boom Worldwide

Let's briefly document the popularity of running worldwide (and then in Poland), thus indicating that the phenomenon of the running boom can be classified neither as temporary nor as niche. The beginnings of the popularity of running—in the global perspective—can be sought in the USA in the second half of the 20th century.[1] In the 1970s and 1980s the first wave of the running boom took place, emanating from the fitness revolution (Scheerder, Van Bottenburg 2009; see also Krawczyk 2004: 14–15, 2007: 66–68, 97) and the ideology of healthism (Zola 1977; Crawford 1980; Stempień 2017c). This was relatively low, what should be referred to the size of the amateur runner population and limited mainly to the USA and, to a lesser extent, Western Europe. Since the beginning of the 21st century we have been observing the second wave, characterized by certain specificities. Firstly, it covers not only North America and Europe, but also other continents, especially Asia (Scheerder, Breedveld, and Borgers 2015: 13). Secondly, it is also a much "higher" wave than the first one. The authors report that in 2013, 3,900 marathons were organized worldwide with a total of 1.6 million people participating, while in 1984 (the peak of the first wave), the number of marathon competitions did not exceed a thousand and the number of participants oscillated around the value of 400,000 (Scheerder, Breedveld, and Borgers 2015: 8–9). The report "The State of Running 2019" (Andersen 2020) cites 70,000 running events to be held worldwide in 2019, with 107.9 million participants. The European population of amateur runners was estimated at 45–55 million people at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century (Breedveld, Scheerder, Borgers 2015: 245–247).

International studies show that the COVID-19 pandemic has not reduced the activity of runners. In fact, it can be observed that: "runners increased their number of runs per week, weekly mileage, and number of times of day they opted to run" (DeJong, Fish, and Hertel 2021). Thus the running boom is a global phenomenon that has been sustained (observed for half a century) and actually covers a significant percentage of the population, including Polish society.

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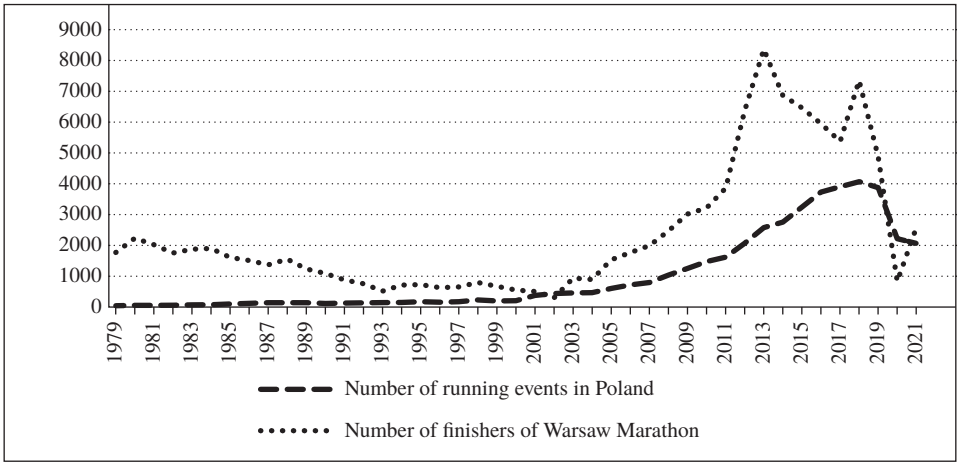
[1] Qviström (2017: 351) points out that, *As part of the welfare society, fitness running was introduced in Sweden in the late 1950s, attracting considerable attention in Sweden and elsewhere in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s*. It should be noted, however, that the American version of recreational running, based on the assumption that one can run anywhere (including parks and streets in big cities), was rather popularized worldwide, while the Swedish version promoted contact with nature through running (mainly in forests).

Polish Perspective

As shown in Figure 1, the popularity of recreational running on a wider scale was not observed in Poland until the beginning of the 21st century. This is indicated by the small number of running competitions. On the other hand, starting from the new century, the number of organized running races has been increasing every year, reaching the maximum value in 2018 (4154 events). The same refers to the number of finishers of the leading marathon race organized in Poland—Warsaw Marathon. Thus, it can be concluded that the second wave of the running boom observed in the world has reached Poland as well.

Figure 1

Popularity of leisure running in Poland in 1979–2021



Source: own elaboration on the basis of data from: www.maratonypolskie.pl.

Referring to the Polish society, in 2018 running was practiced by about 11% of adults, which means a decrease of 7 percentage points compared to the 2013 measurement (Omyła-Rudzka 2018: 3). Considering the size of the Polish population 18+ as recorded by the Central Statistical Office, one can easily calculate that the actual percentage should refer to 3.4 million people.[2] Polish surveys document that the pandemic did not influence the physical activity of runners (Rosak-Szyrocka 2021: 72).

On the other hand, we may feel entitled to formulate a statement that possibly the peak popularity of recreational running has already passed in Poland. Perhaps the running boom is in a way coming to an end. First, the percentage of recreational runners in the Polish population has decreased last years. Second, the number of running events organized in Poland started to decline (even before the COVID-19 pandemic broke out!). In 2019, 3926 running competitions took place in Poland, which is 5% less than in the year before. Previously, the number of events has been growing every year. Third, starting in 2014, the number of participants in the Warsaw Marathon—formerly growing steadily—began to decline (except in

[2] Similar findings are reported by Breedveld, Scheerder and Borgers (2015: 259), who estimate the Polish population of amateur runners in 2013 at 3.07 million people.

2018). If we assume that in fact the running boom is somewhat dying out in Poland,[3] it is all the more worth asking about its social output over the period from the beginning of the 21st century (the emergence of the second wave) to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. These first two decades of the 21st century will constitute the time frame for the analysis.

The time period indicated above is part of a broader period of political, economic, and social modernization that Poland has undergone since the collapse of the communist system in 1989. This process is also sometimes referred to as systemic transformation. Nowicka-Franczak (2018: 321) points out that generally Polish modernization is seen as the "introduction of the democratic system, the free-market economy and the infrastructural development." Drozdowski distinguishes three strategic goals of this modernization, of which he attributes the first two (Poland's accession to NATO and the European Union) to the first modernization step already made, while the third goal—moving away from Wallerstein's stigmatizing semi-peripherality—is only facing Polish society, already tired of the first phase of modernization. It can be assumed that this goal will mean the transformation of Poland into a state and society that is creative, subjective, rich, and that uses the complexity of the contemporary world for its own prosperity (Drozdowski 2014: 77).

Generally speaking, in the case of Poland as a country emerging from peripherality, modernization was associated with Bauman's "the promise of plenty," which should be referred to improving living standards and raising consumption levels (Nowicka-Franczak 2018: 324). Although Polish modernization had its weaknesses (stretched over time, affecting a significant percentage of the population struggling with unemployment and modest living conditions, bringing a significant increase in wealth inequality, etc.), it was still usually considered successful or even exemplary by Western politicians and intellectuals (Nowicka-Franczak 2018: 325). The seizure of power in Poland in 2015 by right-wing Eurosceptics shook this optimism and began to foster predictions of at least a partial reversal of the previous transformations, including a retreat from the rules of the democratic state of law.

What, then, is the social output of the running boom in a country that was undergoing a process of political, economic and social modernization at the time of its occurrence? First, however, let me introduce the category of social footprint that will be central to the analysis.

Social Footprint

Let's begin by considering the question, why not simply use the catalog of social functions assigned to recreation, since the running boom can be viewed as a phenomenon belonging to this domain? Perhaps this could adequately explain the social significance of it. After all, the problems of the functions of recreation and leisure (including physical recreation) have been sufficiently described by many authors (Rojek 1997 basing on: Henderson, Presley,

[3] It seems hardly likely that recreational running will disappear from the field of physical activity in Poland. Its advantages still remain attractive: it is simple and cheap, and therefore easily accessible. Nonetheless, it may now be replaced by other more appealing disciplines, such as those that require higher financial outlays (coach assistance, investment in special equipment) and are therefore more attractive considering the Veblen effect (like currently especially popular cycling or—to refer to more traditionally recognized as prestigious—horse riding, tennis or golfing).

Bialeschki 2004: 415; Kamiński 1965; Kaplan 1975: 142–146; Pierce, Risley 1974). While not rejecting the category of social functions and accepting a systemic view of social life, nevertheless I tend to conclude that the term of the social functions of leisure and recreation do not seem sufficient to explain the social output of the running boom for three reasons.

First, the category of functions focuses our attention to the effects on the social system (society as a whole). Thus, we should consider whether the contribution of a given element to the functioning of the whole system would be a positive or negative contribution. However, our analysis should perhaps go "beyond the good and the evil." After all, it is thinkable that a given element significantly co-shapes (modifies, petrifies, diversifies) the functioning of a social system, but this influence escapes evaluation on a "positive-negative" scale.[4] Secondly, social functions are rather related to social statics (strengthening the existing system, supporting its compactness or resistance to disruptions), but it is reasonable to consider the question of contribution of the phenomenon of interest to social change (particularly in case of Poland under modernization). Contemporary societies are subject to a number of dynamic transformations in various dimensions (cultural, structural, economic etc.). Therefore, for example one may ask not only whether the spread of certain patterns of spending leisure time is an emanation of these processes, but also the other way round: whether it fuels or slows down these processes. And thirdly (last, but not least), functions are attributed to permanent, durable components of the social system, that we are keen to describe as "institutionalized." Functions to a lesser extent seem to be compatible with social phenomena—even if they are characterized by a certain permanence—episodic, particular, exceptional, to which we would be able to assign a "proper noun" (Latin *nomina propria*).

Thus, instead of using the category of social functions, I propose to refer to the term of social footprint. However, before I present my idea of the social footprint (which will include a definition of this category, a description of what phenomena it can be applied to, what assumptions I rely on, and what guidelines for analysis I adopt), I need to point to some sources of inspiration for the use of this term.

The concept of social footprint itself is not new, but I would like to propose to give it a new content. This term, someway similar to the categories of "carbon footprint" or, more broadly, the "ecological footprint" (Mancini et al. 2016), so far, seems to have been used mainly in management sciences, in the context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Thus, the social footprint of a product, technological process or institution (especially a corporation) was and is considered, and its impact on the functioning of the local (possibly wider) community is analyzed (see for example Henriques 2010; Weidema 2018; Van Balen, Haezendonck, Verbeke 2021; Bueno et al. 2021; Kaldellis et al. 2016; Holger et al. 2017)

I would like to understand and use the term "social footprint" in wider context within pure sociological perspective. With this term I intend to describe and analyze significance of concrete social phenomena that cannot be reduced to the status of permanent elements of a social system, with assigned functions. Examples of such phenomena (I note that the list is not complete) can be:

[4] This line of thinking was presented by Merton (2002: 122), who distinguished between functional, dysfunctional and nonfunctional effects of certain phenomena.

— a concrete social movement (like the Polish "Solidarity" or the Ukrainian Euromaidan);
— a revolution or a national uprising;
— a cultural and moral revolution (like the student revolt of 1968 or the fitness revolution of the 1970s);
— a particular social institution, such as a political party, church, or non-governmental organization (like the Polish Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity).

Phenomena that we can consider in this perspective are exceptional, without precedent. They have their specific cultural and structural sources (the ideology of healthism in case of the running boom), which cannot be reduced to functions or explained through functions. When we consider these phenomena, we invariably deal with concretes, referring to specific events, individuals (like charismatic leaders), groups or times (!), while the discussion of functions stays on a high level of abstraction, requiring unification of all elements that are ascribed to a given set. Phenomena of our interest are a particular emanation of an epoch, that at the same time co-shapes their times.

By the term "social footprint" I propose to understand reasonable, empirically demonstrable consequences and outcomes (effects) of a particular social phenomenon, which can be observed in the case of a given community in a separate period of time. I assume that the phenomenon we are interested in does not have to be the sole cause of the social consequences that are attributed to it (I even expect that such situations may occur rarely). At the same time, I believe that the idea of social footprint will allow us to consider social significance of a given phenomenon: how does it co-shape social life in its various dimensions (micro-, mezzo- and macro-) as well as what is its impact from the perspective of social change or social petrification?

The concept of "social footprint" thus sketched is based on several presumptions. These could probably be acceptable to many sociologists, nonetheless it seems appropriate to present them:

1. Social life has a systemic rather than chaotic or accidental character and particular domains of social life remain in certain relations to each other and are interrelated.
2. When analyzing a particular social phenomena (practices, institutions, social movements, fashions) we should describe not only their origins (sources) and manifestations, but also consequences.
3. Even completely exceptional, unprecedented, unique phenomenon may or even should be considered in this perspective.

At the same time, I would like to propose the following guidelines for conducting an analysis using the category of "social footprint." They are based on standard sociological knowledge and will be used by me in the study of the social consequences and output of the running boom, which will be presented in the following part of the article:

1. A specific, clearly defined and distinguished collective (society of a given country, local community, social class) should be considered.
2. The analysis should be conducted in relation to a clearly defined period of time. The timeframe should be justified (substantive separation) and long enough for the occurrence of social effects to be realistic.
3. The phenomenon of which we intend to consider the social footprint should be characterized by adequate scope (involvement of a significant proportion of the

population, durability over time) to make it reasonable to pronounce on the occurrence of a social footprint.
4. The analysis should be based on reliable, credible, and multiple empirical data.
5. The analysis should refer to those levels of sociological reflection (micro-, mezzo-, and macro-) that are appropriate to the scope of the analysis (see point 1).
6. The analysis should consider both the question of effects in the form of social stabilization (petrification) and social change.
7. During the analysis, the researcher should be candidly open to the possibility of determining the actual absence of a social footprint of the phenomenon under consideration.

The Social Footprint of the Running Boom—Case of Poland

It is assumed that the social footprint of the running boom should be considered at three levels of sociological analysis: macro-social, mezzo-social and micro-social, taking into account two vectors: the vector of maintenance (petrification) and the vector of social change. As the analysis will be dedicated to the country under the social (political and economic as well) modernization, the issue of social change surely is to be vital here (see table 1).

Table 1

The social footprint of the running boom in Poland in the perspective of first two decades of the 21st century

Level of analysis	Social peterification / maintenance	Social change
Macro-social level	—	strengthening the process of transforming the social structure to the Western model
Mezzo-social level	—	building of social capital empowering the stand and identity of new institutional actors modernization of rural and urban landscape in social and spatial dimension
Micro-social level	preserving traditional male and female social roles	creating a new female social role

Source: own elaboration.

Macro-level

Let's start with macro-level deliberations. In the case of modernizing Poland, one can speak of the contribution—to some extent—of the running boom to the transformation of the social structure along Western lines. The specific social structure of communist Polish society should be recalled here, which included the peasantry, the working class (large industrial and peripheral), the rationed segment of small business, the intelligentsia (including office workers, specialists and *profession libérale*) with its specific ethos, and

the ruling elite (Janicka, Słomczyński 2014: 61). The intelligentsia is generally defined as a social stratum of educated people who are characterized by a sense of social mission and responsibility, an orientation toward non-material values, and who tend to separate themselves (distinction) using the barrier of good parenting (cultural capital). Szelenvi considered the intelligentsia as aspiring to power in communist systems in Eastern Europe, stressing that it could be defined as the set of "intellectuals who maintain the domination of the teleological component of knowledge above technical know-how" (1982: 308).

While in relation to Poland the sociological controversy can be dated back to the 1990s, whether intelligentsia would transform into a middle class (Wesołowski 1994; Borucki 1994: 114; Mokrzycki 1994: 51–52) and, more generally, whether the structure of the whole society would resemble structures typical for Western capitalist societies (Pluciński 2010: 108 et seq.), contemporary authors seem to already accept the fact of such a transition (Gdula, Sadura 2012; Kubicki 2011; Burski 2016; Bombol 2011) or the considerable advancement of this process (Domański 2012, 2016). It is recognized that experiences, practices, and styles are class-defined (including by membership in the middle class) and as such are subject of sociological investigation in Poland (see: Burlita 2006; Dębska 2019).

Table 2

Polish leisure runners by affiliation to social classes (in %)

Social class	Measurement 2014 (N = 765)	Measurement 2015 (N = 888)	Measurement 2016 (N = 800)
Upper	17	17	19
Middle	78	76	73
Lower / working	5	7	8
Total	100	100	100

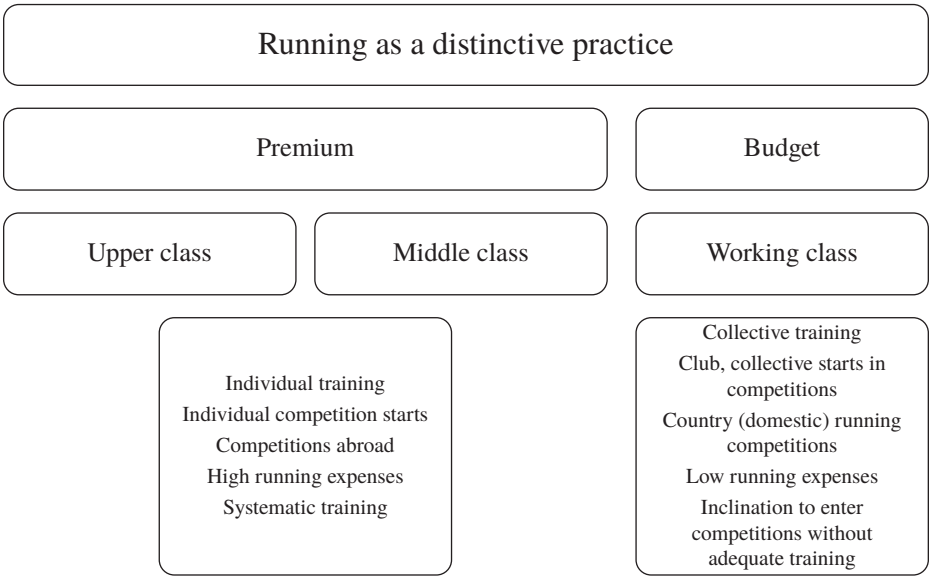
Source: Stempień 2017c.

In this situation the fact that the Polish running boom can be viewed with reference to class categories is of great significance. My surveys showed that—taking into account the type of work performed (professionals, technicians and other middle personnel, office workers), the level of education (university degree) and the self-assessed material situation (good)—almost 3/4 of Polish amateur runners can be assessed as belonging to the middle class (see table 2). Moreover, about 1/6 of the amateur runner population can be considered to belong to the upper class (very good financial situation, managerial job, university education) (Stempień 2017c: 138–143). Quite similar results were obtained in his survey of marathon runners by Waśkowski (2014: 9). It turned out that white-collar workers represented 56% of the respondents, while entrepreneurs: 13%.

However, it is not just the dominance of the recreational runners' community by individuals who can be considered to belong to the middle and possibly upper classes. It is important to note that the source of this special predilection of white collars for running is strictly class-based. Not only does recreational running require those personal qualities (such as self-control, asceticism, diligence, and individualism) that are typical of midlevel class representatives, but it also seems to play a role in demarcating group (in

Scheme 1

Typology of practices of Polish recreational runners in class perspective



Source: Stempień 2017b.

this case, social class) boundaries. This is manifested in class-defined patterns of running engagement.

In my research (Stempień 2017b) I identified two patterns of running activity: budget and premium (see Scheme 1). The first of these is typical for members of the working class, who are relatively eager to seek collective forms of pursuing their passion for running (e.g. by becoming active in running clubs). They willingly participate in numerous running competitions, but rather in the country than abroad. They spend relatively small amounts of money on running. Quite often, they decide to take part in competitions without adequate (long-term) training, which can be seen as a manifestation of the typical for this class risky attitude to the body. The premium version, on the other hand, is the domain of the upper and middle class representatives. Their running practices should allow them to mark their social position and affordability. Hence the relatively high spending on running equipment and willing participation in (prestigious) foreign running events. Representatives of the upper segments of the social structure are more likely to pursue their running passions in solitude (aristocratic "splendid isolation") , training in a persistent, systematic manner.

Thus, running is a distinctive practice that allows individuals to manifest their relatively high, attractive class belonging. The above findings, which are empirical in nature, are based on Bourdieu's theory, but we can employ here a Crawford's concept of healthism as well (Crawford 1980; Stempień 2017c). The contemporary Polish running boom (just like its Western prototype) seems to be an offshoot of the spread of middle-class ideology of healthism, which places particular stress on individual responsibility for health, which is perceived as the supreme value in life. In my study in 2014 (N = 1078), almost half of the

surveyed leisure runners reported that they had started running trainings to take care of their health. This was the answer chosen most often (and the upper and middle classes' members chosen it more readily than representatives of the working class). Moreover, as many as 92% of the respondents agreed with the opinion that "Everyone has a great influence on their own health; health depends primarily on lifestyle" (Stempień 2017c).

It is worth pointing out here the typology of somatic culture patterns proposed by Krawczyk (1995: 105–109, 2000: 80–85; see also Cynarski 2017: 146–147). It includes: (1) the aesthetic pattern, associated with the cultivation of the beauty of the human body; (2) the hedonistic pattern, connected with the pursuit of pleasurable bodily sensations; (3) the ascetic pattern, to which various restraints on bodily needs are inherent; (4) the hygienic pattern, the spread of which is linked with the medicalization of society and which is oriented toward the cultivation of health; (5) the fitness pattern, cultivating physical athleticism and stamina, which, from a historical perspective, can be associated with the Spartan and chivalric traditions; (6) the agonistic pattern—which, according to Veblen, can be associated with the aristocratic lifestyle—for which the category of bravery, expressed in combat and competition, is central. It seems that the class-defined orientations described above would indicate following primarily a hygienic (healthism) and ascetic pattern (strenuous effort, arduous training, disciplining the body) and possibly a fitness pattern.

Summing up, the sources of the running boom in Poland are as structural and class-based as in the case of Western societies (Stempień 2017c), and running activity seems to play similar class tasks (distinction, demarcation) as in the case of societies in developed countries (Stempień 2017b). Apparently, the newly forming Polish middle (and upper) class thus adopted a lifestyle orientation inspired by Western models.

Mezzo-level

With regard to the mezzo-social level, it should be stated that the running boom contributes to the generation of social capital. In Poland as a country under modernization this problem is of special importance. Bartkowski emphasized in 2004 that low resources of social capital were one of the most important obstacles to the development of Eastern and Central European countries. The lack of social capital is considered as one of the main reasons, after poverty and lack of resources, for their failure to seize new opportunities. However, since then, social capital indicators for Poland have improved somewhat. Between 2006 and 2020, the percentage of Poles saying they trust strangers increased from 33% to 40% (Omyła-Rudzka 2020: 3). At the same time, the percentage of people volunteering for NGOs increased from 23% to 43% (Bożewicz 2020: 4). It is arguable that the running boom contributed at least a little to this.

Generating of social capital in case of leisure running may occur through two channels. Firstly, there are the so-called charity runs, where participants—on their own initiative or encouraged by organizers or sponsors—dedicate their long-distance effort to a particular project and raise money for it. The idea originated in the USA, but it is popularizing all over the world (Palmer, Dwyer 2020; Mirehie, Buning, Gibson 2017), including in countries undergoing modernization. My research shows that up to 40% of recreational

runners participating in competitions may have the experience of being actively involved (at least once in their lives) in such activities (not donating, but fundraising) (Stempień 2016: 64–65; see also Poczta et al. 2021). Secondly, runners are willing to associate in clubs and thus share their passion with others. In Poland, 99 running clubs were recently identified. These were generally local organizations, with an average membership of 36 (Stempień 2017a: 117). In such organizations runners have the opportunity to improve their organizational and social competences. Out of 3,777 running events that took place in Poland in 2017 and out of 2,792 events from 2014 respectively 67% and 69% were organized by NGOs (including running clubs) (Stempień, Mielczarek, Tokarski 2021: 32).

Keeping on the mezzo-social level of analysis, we can assume that the running boom in Poland has contributed to the strengthening of the position and identity of new institutional actors, i.e. local government bodies. The creation of local government was an important element of the political transformation in the 1990s (Klimek 2019; Regulski 1989). Among the successes of this reform, one should point out the very fact of the decentralization of the state and the organization of a rather large state territory (for European standards) into structures that include both entities of local and regional importance. The design and implementation of the reform at the level of the smallest territorial units, i.e. municipalities (pol. gmina), is generally well appreciated (Myśliwiec 2015: 11–13). However, a significant shortcoming of the functioning of local government units in Poland is in many cases their poor financial condition (Myśliwiec 2015: 16 et seq.); this problem is systemic in nature. Other weaknesses in the functioning of local government in Poland, which were pointed out as late as in 2013, include the statist tendency, autocratism (instead of collective management) and flawed communitarianism. The latter phenomenon consisted of, among others, the sham nature of civic dialogue, the lack of partnership relations between local authorities and citizens, and a limited willingness to cooperate, which ultimately led to the disappointment of citizens and their abandonment of attempts to establish cooperation with local government (Bober et al. 2013: 14; Radomski 2017: 304; Stempień 2009). It seems reasonable to conclude that the running boom has opened some space for reducing these weaknesses, as to some extent not only strengthening the position of local government, but also allowing for the promotion of regions and contributing to the quality of local democracy.

By initiating running events or supporting these initiatives (through funding or patronage), local authorities present themselves as the actual administrators of a given area, praising the region and promoting healthy lifestyles among their inhabitants. Research shows that these are not isolated actions. The organizer or co-organizer of half of the running events in Poland in 2014 and 2017 were local authorities or institutions subordinate to them (e.g. municipal sports and recreation centers). Although these events were supported by institutional patronage quite rarely (13% in 2014 and 17% in 2017), local authorities proved to be the most important actor in this field (Stempień, Mielczarek, Tokarski 2021: 34). Thus, it can be said that local authorities in Poland have become important stakeholders of the running boom, i.e. "institutions that obtain objective, realized (and by themselves planned and estimated), tangible, and intangible benefits related to the development of recreational running, defined in terms of achieving the goals for which these institutions were established" (Stempień, Mielczarek, Tokarski 2021: 27). It should

be noted that the organization of running events is often a platform for cooperation between local government and NGOs, which is certainly not without significance for civic dialogue and local democracy. Both in 2014 and in 2017, more or less every fourth running event in Poland (28%) was organized by such a consortium (Stempień, Mielczarek, Tokarski 2021: 32). Each time, this amounted to almost one hundred events per year, which were located in all 16 provinces (voivodeships) in the country. Of course, the functioning of such consortia must also have a positive impact on social capital resources in some dimension.

The last distinguished aspect of social footprint of the running boom in Poland at the mezzo-level is the modernization of rural and urban landscape in social and spatial dimension. As concerning the Polish countryside, it illustrates the post-communist heritage (Starosta 1999). However, since then, the Polish countryside has experienced significant modernization, including deruralization, deagrarianization, the formation of a new agricultural model, and restratification (Halamska 2011). The latter process consists of the phenomenon of so-called social gentrification, i.e. saturation of the social structure of the countryside with people occupying higher positions in the social stratification, included in the middle class (Halamska 2016: 64). It is estimated that between 1991 and 2013 the share of representatives of the middle class increased among rural residents from 15.3% to 27.1% (Halamska 2016: 65). This means that fewer and fewer rural residents make a living from agriculture (also modernizing, in which large farms have an increasing share), and a lifestyle typical for the urban middle class is being implemented in the countryside.

One can argue that the running boom has contributed to social innovation (and through it to modernization) in the rural areas, where until now we have largely observed a kind of monoculture in the field of sport and recreation. Its main animators were Popular Sports Teams [Ludowe Zespoły Sportowe], and the dominant sport was soccer (Burdyka 2019). In fact, this monoculture originated from the previous political and economic system. Today, a quarter of all running events in Poland take place in rural areas (Stempień, Mielczarek, Tokarski 2021: 29), and 12 of the 99 Polish running clubs identified (1/8) operate there (Stempień 2017a: 117–119). Amateur runners living in rural areas accounted for 16% of respondents in the National Census of Runners 2014 of over 60,000 people (Raport Polska Biega — Narodowy Spis Biegaczy 2014: 8). Waśkowski obtained similar results in his 2014 on-line survey of amateur marathoners. Although rural residents report recreational running less often (15%) than urban residents (18%) (Łysoń 2017: 184), this disproportion is not large.

On the other hand, urban space is a key arena for the running boom. The running boom seems to have contributed to the transformations in the use and arrangement of urban space in Poland and probably in other countries undergoing the process of modernization. Firstly, we can speak of the popularization of street runs in large cities, following the Western model. Today, every larger city in Poland has its own marathon (and not infrequently also half-marathon), already boasting a certain tradition. Another initiative that is also imitative in nature are parkrun events, currently gaining great popularity in Polish cities (Malchrowicz et al. 2020). These are non-profit, weekly, inclusive events on short distance (5 km) that have become very popular around the world in recent years. Some researchers even call this phenomenon a global social movement for increasing physical activity and health promotion (Malchrowicz et al. 2020).

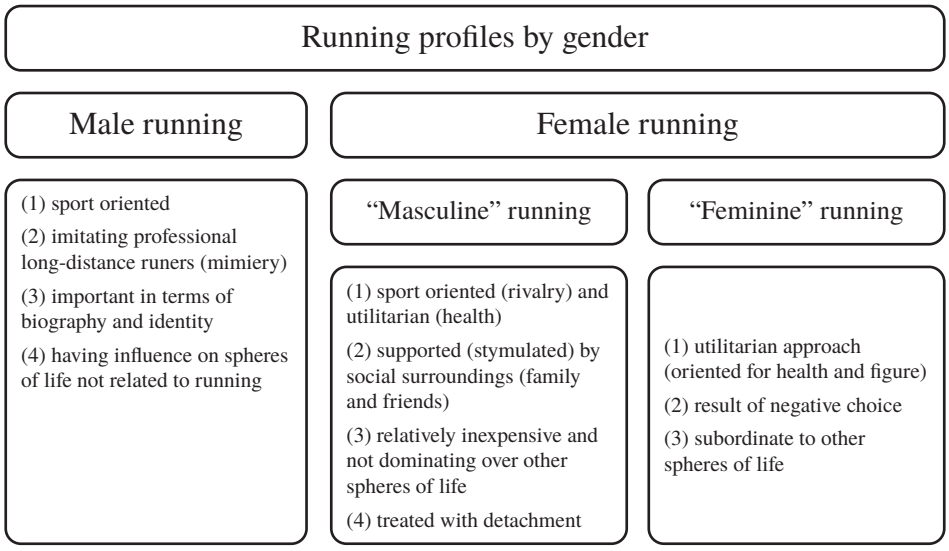
Micro-level

At the micro-social level, we can consider the social footprint of the running boom in Poland in relation to the transformation of female and male social roles. The structure of the population of recreational runners will help here.

My survey among participants in the Lodz Marathon documents a strong masculinization of the runners' population. Only 26% (in 2014) and 30% (in 2015) of those who responded were female (Stempień 2015: 191). Similar results were obtained by Waśkowski (2014: 7) in his survey among marathoners: only 25% of investigated were female. The National Census of Runners 2014 proved that women counted for about 39% of leisure runners (the survey was dedicated to all runners, not only participants in running events) [Raport Polska Biega — Narodowy Spis Biegaczy 2014: 8]. The masculinization of the runners' population may be explained by the fact that marathon effort seems to correspond to features culturally defined as typically masculine (perseverance, bravery, resistance to pain and fatigue, strength, etc.) and a career of an amateur long-distance runner may confirm such a typical masculine identity. In such a case, men would pursue the agonistic pattern of somatic culture in the typology by Krawczyk (1995: 105–109, 2000: 80–85; see also Cynarski 2017: 146–147). In view of this, the running boom would in some ways conserve the traditionally defined content of gendered social roles.

Scheme 2

Male and female profiles of Polish runners



Source: Stempień 2015.

Nevertheless, the second wave of running around the world brought a certain egalitarianism and running became attractive also for women. Today, the participation of women in the most recognized and popular marathon runs in the USA exceeds 40%, while in European marathons women account for 1/4 to 2/5 of the participants (Stempień 2018: 99).

Although the data for Poland are slightly different, the trend is significant: in 2017, women accounted for 17–18% of the total completers of competitions included in the so-called Crown of Polish Marathons, while four or five years earlier the share of ladies among participants in Polish marathons oscillated around the value of 10% (Stempień 2018: 99–100).

My research shows that women cultivate their own pattern of running (see Scheme 2). Generally, they do not take this activity as seriously as men, attaching importance to its health-promoting qualities rather than its sporting aspects (Stempień 2015: 203–206). If one were to refer to the Serious Leisure Perspective by Stebbins (2020), it could be said that it is more typical for men to treat running as Serious Leisure, while in case of women it is an example of a typical activity of the Casual Leisure domain. Nevertheless, it can be considered that we are dealing with a situation in which women take up an activity that was previously considered rather masculine. Some of them practice running in a way similar to men's running, presenting a competitive orientation. This is part of a broader emancipation process in which new female social roles are being created (Cynarski 2017: 72–86; see also Dziubiński, Jasny 2017: 70).

Final remarks

Before proper summarizing the considerations presented here, I would like to address one more point that can be summarized in the question: "why running"? Well, one may wonder, whether the issues addressed in the presented study are not too narrow or selective. Would it not be better to consider the significance of another popular discipline of physical recreation (such as recently fashionable exercises in fitness clubs or marching with walking poles) or simply address the significance of mass physical activity as an emanation of the aforementioned fitness revolution? The answer to these objections would be as follows. First, the running boom seems to be a uniquely defined, "compact" phenomenon that is constituted by a specific social practice and cultivated by a set of individuals with specific demographic characteristics, something we cannot say about the popularity of healthy/active lifestyles. Second, the running boom is a persistent phenomenon, dating back two or perhaps three generations (two decades in case of Poland). Its social significance (social footprint) can be recorded, as opposed to transient fads and ephemeral trends that may prove insignificant in the long term. Third, running is still among the most popular disciplines of physical recreation in Poland (Omyła-Rudzka 2018: 3–5); we are not considering here the importance of a niche activity, but on the contrary, the importance of an activity systematically undertaken by a significant percentage of the population (3.4 million people in 2018).

How should we understand the power and mechanics of the running boom and the whole idea of the social footprint of the running boom? Undoubtedly, the popularity of running does not so much define (determine) certain social processes (Polish modernization) as it is one more field in which they take place. So we can say that the running boom feeds certain social processes. Of course, it does not cause them, and it is also difficult to claim that without the running boom their course would be impossible or even disrupted. Undoubtedly, however, the factual trajectory of these processes remains a resultant of social

forces, among which the running boom should be noted. Referring to the case of Poland, it can be said that its' transformation and modernization in the Western Europe model involves inter alia a new class order, partly a new lifestyle, transformations in the area of social mezzostructures (associations, local government, transformations in space and its use in cities and in the country), and—on a micro-scale—certain changes in the content of social roles. The running boom contributed to changes in all these areas.

I would like to propose here a metaphor of a gutter, draining—as one of many—water from the roof. Without it, rainwater would go down as well; perhaps its role would be taken over by other functioning gutters. This does not change the fact that it is an element of some importance, contributing to the channeling of phenomena that it did not cause, but which would have occurred without its participation, although probably in a different way. This is how I see the social footprint of the running boom.

It is worth recalling here the observation of Krawczyk (2000: 131–140), who argued that the constitution of physical culture in communist Poland (and in the rest of the Eastern Bloc countries) was conditioned by the dominant ideology and the requirements of the prevailing political system. The study performed on the social footprint of the running boom shows that this correspondence between social macro-processes and social macro-order and phenomena in the area of physical recreation persists in the case of the Polish society. Indeed, there are many indications that the Polish running boom fed the modernization processes which the whole society has experienced in recent decades.

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