

<http://dx.doi.org/10.16926/sit.2021.04.23>

Marek WAIC*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4965-9899>

Development of Women's Sport in Central Europe before the First World War

Jak cytować [how to cite]: Waic M., *Development of Women's Sport in Central Europe before the First World War*, "Sport i Turystyka. Środkowoeuropejskie Czasopismo Naukowe" 2021, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 11–20.

Rozwój sportu kobiecego w Europie Środkowej przed I wojną światową

Streszczenie

W Niemczech, Austrii, Czechach i Galicji, w związku z rozwojem ruchów Turnera i Sokoła, powstają kobiece stowarzyszenia gimnastyczne. Kobiety nie uprawiały sportu w Europie Środkowej do lat 80. XIX wieku. Przed I wojną światową sport kobiecy na ziemiach czeskich rozwijał się podobnie jak w Niemczech i austriackiej części regionu Cisleithanian. W okresie poprzedzającym I wojnę światową kobiecy sport rozwijał się w hegemonicznym męskim społeczeństwie. Przedstawiciele tego męskiego społeczeństwa wymuszali idee o społecznej roli kobiet w sporcie, dyktując kobietom, jakie sporty są dla nich odpowiednie i jak powinny je uprawiać. Do sportów uważanych za odpowiednie dla kobiet należały pływanie i tenis. Kobiety po raz pierwszy rywalizowały w golfie i tenisie na igrzyskach olimpijskich w Paryżu w 1900 r. Ponadto trzecie miejsce w tenisie zajęła Jadwiga Rosenbaumová, która w programie igrzysk figurowała jako reprezentantka Pragi. W austriackiej, czeskiej i węgierskiej części monarchii kobiety grały w tenisa, jeździły na łyżwach i jeździły na rowerze. W Galicji rozwinęło się kobiece wychowanie fizyczne w Sokole, a pod koniec XIX wieku w Krakowie, Lwowie i Warszawie powstały szkoły gimnastyczne.

Słowa kluczowe: sport kobiet, tenis, pływanie, igrzyska olimpijskie.

* Prof., PhD, CSc., Charles University, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport (Czech Republic); e-mail: waic@ftvs.cuni.cz

Abstract

In Germany, Austrian and Czech lands and Galicia, women's gym associations were established in connection with Turner and Sokol gymnastics development. Women did not participate in sport in Central Europe until the 1880s. Before the First World War, women's sport in the Czech lands developed similarly to Germany and the Austrian part of the Cisleithanian region. In the period leading up to the First World War, women's sport developed within a hegemonic masculine society. Representatives of this masculine society enforced ideas about the social role of women in sport by dictating to women which sports disciplines were appropriate for them and how they should practise them. Swimming and tennis belonged to sports considered suitable for women. Women first competed in golf and tennis contests at the Olympics in Paris in 1900. In addition, Hedwig Rosenbaumová, who was listed on the programme of the games as a representative of Prague, won the third place in tennis. Women played tennis, skated, and cycled in the Austrian, Czech, and Hungarian parts of the monarchy. In Galicia, women's physical education developed in Sokol and at the end of the 19th century gymnastics schools were established in Kraków, Lviv and Warsaw.

Keywords: women's sport, tennis, swimming, Olympic games.

Introduction

In the rapidly developing regions of Central Europe, the first sports organizations emerged with the highest purpose of service to national independence. Their development tended towards collectivism expressed by a hierarchically structured organization headed by leaders, which fitted well into the concept of a modern nation whose identity consisted of language, shared cultural traditions, and economic interests. Typical examples of sports organizations, which fulfilled these characteristics without reservation, were the German Turner movement and the Czech (or Slavic) Sokol movement.¹

Sports organizations were founded by men who emphasized their military potential, and therefore, they were purely male organizations. After the fall of the Bach absolutism at the turn of the 1850s and 1860s and the adoption of the constitution, social conditions in the Habsburg monarchy relaxed to such an extent that citizens could associate in different organizations, sports associations included. In December 1861, the Germans of Prague founded the first Turner Association, and in February of the following year, the Czechs formed the first Sokol unit. Its founders discussed the membership of women in the newly formed association, but after some hesitation, rejected it as socially intolerable.²

¹ The Turner movement, founded by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and Ernst Eiselen, originated in Prussia during the Napoleonic Wars. The date of origin is 1812. The mission of the movement was the unification of Germany and all the Germans in general. Turner exercises included mainly equipment and floor gymnastics, German national games and military disciplines. The main founder of the Sokol movement was Miroslav Tyrš and it was to serve the Czech national emancipation and the idea of Slavic reciprocity. The content of the exercises was similar to that of the Turner gymnastics.

² M. Waic, *Tělovýchova a sport ve službách české národní emancipace [Physical Education and Sport in the Service of National Emancipation]*, Karolinum Press, Prague 2013, p. 74.

Results and discussion

The beginnings of the efforts for social emancipation of women and girls in the Czech lands also date back to the 1860s. The main protagonists were enlightened men but also women who established themselves in culture, specifically in literature, which aimed to renew the Czech language and culture. Thanks to their novels, they became famous and were able to engage more effectively in society's enlightenment, focusing on the then-revolutionary ideas that a woman can engage in activities other than caring for her husband, housework, and raising children.³ Female emancipation activists came from the middle class and strived mainly to advance girls' education. The second half of the nineteenth century's education system, which was focused mainly on domestic work, significantly narrowed the career options of girls from the middle class. They could obtain education beyond the basic literacy in a few private schools only to find employment as governesses or nurses. From the turn of the 1860s and 1870s, in the Austrian and Czech lands, women could graduate from a teacher's institute and teach in primary schools. In middle school, the classes were divided according to gender, and only female teachers were allowed to work in girls' classes. Probably the first grammar school for girls in Austria-Hungary, 'Minerva' was founded in Prague in 1890, and for the next seven years, this private institute did not have the right to grant a high school diploma and young women had to pass the exam at boys' institutes.⁴ Although limited, the opportunities for education and employment in the teaching profession were the first steps on the path to women's emancipation. Nevertheless, until the First World War, women in family life remained subordinate to men and had to devote themselves mainly to housework and raising children. They could only go out into society accompanied by their husbands. Some parts of social life, such as politics, were reserved for men only. Women also had to play a submissive role in their intimate life. In the context of the bourgeois morality of the nineteenth century, it was assumed that a man would enter into a marriage with sexual experience, and therefore his sex life before entering into marriage was, unlike a woman, socially accepted. There are virtually no sources on the intimate life of bourgeoisie and middle class families because this topic was completely taboo. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, members of the Viennese artistic avant-garde began to articulate a new concept of eroticism. However, Prague, which remained provincial compared to Vienna until the First World War and was not affected by this concept.

³ These were Eliška Krásnohorská (1847–1926) and Karolina Světlá (1830–1899). Both writers were well known in the Czech environment and enjoyed the same popularity like their male counterparts. Both were involved in the women's emancipation movement.

⁴ M. Lenderová, T. Jiránek, and M. Macková, *Z dějin české každodennosti: život v 19. Století [From the History of Czech Everyday Life: Life in the 19th century]*, Karolinum Press, Prague 2017, p. 226.

Although social emancipation demands addressed girls and women from all walks of life, they practically concerned only middle-class women. Working-class families' income and the corresponding housing and education opportunities, offered only two options to girls: to marry and care for children or to work in a factory in the same terrible hygienic conditions like men, but for lower wages.⁵ At the same time, bourgeois values and conventions did not succeed in the urban proletariat environment. Factory work and cramped living conditions in working-class colonies led to a more collective way of life, including children's upbringing, making working-class women less submissive to male authority than middle-class girls and women.

By the end of the 1860s, the phenomenon of sport travelled from England to the countries of Central Europe. Many of the young merchants and students from Central Europe who came to the British Isles in the nineteenth century returned home fascinated by English sports. They were enchanted by the sheer activity, full of vigour and competition, the possibility of exciting victories, and the external features of sport, such as jerseys and rituals manifesting club identity. Similarly, young English travellers became the pioneers of sport in Central Europe.⁶ All of these young men then stood at the birth of the first sports clubs in the Danube monarchy and thanks to them, sport became a phenomenon in Central Europe, particularly in metropolitan areas of Berlin, Vienna, Prague, and Budapest.

The development of sports in the region was similar for all the countries. The unifying factors in the period up to the First World War were (1) a similar model of the origin and development of modern physical education and sport; (2) the influence of the German cultural environment (German was the primary language of communication in Central Europe and also spoken by members of the middle class in Prague and Budapest); and (3) new technologies and means of communication (the Austrian Post Office started operating in the 1850s, the 1870s saw the introduction of the telephone and the development and modernization of an intricate railway network) that facilitated the spread of the phenomenon within the countries. Due to the multinational nature of the region, ethnic-coloured clashes often tainted sports life. Most of the athletes, mostly from Austrian, Czech, and Hungarian clubs, experienced a strong sense of dual identity – national and club. Interestingly, these national quarrels were absent in sports dominated by high society, such as tennis. In these sports, the feeling of social superiority was more prevalent than that of national superiority.

The main protagonists of sports life were young men from the emerging middle-class (students, civil servants, doctors, lawyers), who were eager for every-

⁵ Z. Jindra, and I. Jakubec, *Hospodářský vzestup českých zemí od poloviny 18. Století do konce monarchie* [The Economic Rise of the Czech Lands from the Middle of the 18th Century to the End of the Monarchy], Karolinum Press, Prague 2015, p. 139.

⁶ M. Mauer, *Vom Mutterland des Sports zum Kontinent: Der Transfer des englischen Sports im 19. Jahrhundert* [From the Motherland of Sport to the Continent: the Transfer of English Sport in the 19th century], Institut für Europäische Geschichte, Mainz 2011.

thing new and adventurous and whose professions allowed them to engage in sport in their free time. The only sport that remained in the domain of the lower strata was strength athletics, it was especially popular in professions such as blacksmith and butcher, where strength training was in the nature of their occupation. In England, women were also involved in strength athletics, albeit in the minority, but unlike men, came from different social classes.⁷ This did not catch on in Central Europe because it would be socially unacceptable even as entertainment for the lower class.

The growing public interest in sports was also manifested in the emergence of sports journalism. In the 1880s, periodicals reporting exclusively on sporting events began to be published in Central Europe; the most prominent were the Austrian *Allgemeine Sport-Zeitung* (since 1879) and the German *Sport im Bild* (since 1895). The reports and commentaries in these periodicals show that women were also involved in sporting life from the 1880s onwards. However, according to the fervent proponents of the traditional hegemonic masculine concept of sport, they were allowed to do so only under male guidance and protection. The majority of society was willing to admit women only in those sports activities that were considered suitable for them and that corresponded to the subordinate role the woman was to play in the family, social and professional life. The creators of the concept of bourgeois morality and the patterns and ritualization of behaviour were middle-class men who, in a rapidly developing industrial society, intended to achieve all the rights hitherto reserved for aristocrats and the wealthy bourgeoisie. At the same time, they wanted to maintain a dominant position towards the opposite sex in family and social life to preserve the sense of their own importance and superiority. The legitimacy of this attitude derived from male economic dominance – they were the breadwinners of the family and the donors of their daughters' dowries.

In sport, most of the middle-class society was willing to accept a female athlete's image in a long skirt, for example, in tennis (preferably in mixed doubles). However, women did not want to accept the role of mere accompaniment to their partners. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, sport represented a medium that could provide women's emancipation efforts with necessary publicity and active sportswomen with an enriching emotional experience. However, men were not willing to share their domain in the sport of racing, and they portrayed women on a racetrack as an inappropriate or even repulsive phenomenon. The first Czech sports magazine *Cyklista* (Cyclist) in 1893 wrote: "There is no sight more embarrassing and harmful to the respectability of the female sex than a lady or a girl rushing down the track in a racing position with burning cheeks and out of breath in front of a multitude of men."⁸

⁷ B. Wedemeyer-Kolwe, *Frauen im bürgerlichen Kraftsport des Fin Siècle*, "Sport Zeiten" 2019, 19, no. 2, p. 53–66.

⁸ *Cyklista: odborný list pro zájmy sportu cyklistického* 9 [The Cyclist: an expert paper for those interested in cycling] (1893), p. 35.

Before the First World War, however, the hegemonic masculine sports public tolerated women's participation in the sports disciplines they considered appropriate for them, such as tennis, skating, and to some extent, swimming. The main criteria for selecting suitable sports were the health aspect (women were to participate only in sport appropriate to their physical abilities) and aesthetic (and societal) aspects. In other words, women were not to do anything too exerting and were to play sports 'decently dressed'. For example, there were no health objections to swimming, but some pointed out that the presentation of a woman in a swimming suit in public was beyond decency and good taste. In August 1881, the swimming teachers club organized a women's swimming competition on the Danube. This competition was met with a snide sexist commentary in the Viennese daily *Illustrirtes Wiener Extrablatt* which was later reprinted by the *Allgemeine Sport-Zeitung* as an example of a backward attitude towards women's sport. The author of the commentary mentions that "Some ladies wore swimming costumes which left the shoulders and both legs completely bare and that the shoulders were not always beautifully shaped and the legs were sometimes even dirty."⁹ Skating and tennis gave no chance to such comments, as ladies came to courts and ice rinks in long skirts and long-sleeved blouses and moved with grace typical for their sex. In June 1895, the second Austrian tennis tournament took place in Prague, which included ladies singles and doubles (provided that at least four pairs meet).¹⁰ Another sports discipline that opened to women in the 1880s was rowing, and women's crews participated in rowing regattas. In September 1882, the most widely read Czech newspaper, *Národní listy* (National Lists), published a report on rowing competitions in Roudnice nad Labem: "The race started with a ride of four ladies, active members of the Czech Athletic Club, who finished the 1000m track in 7 minutes and 45 seconds to the applause of the audience and other rowers, who already recognized the performance of the ladies dressed in nice blue dresses with fine white trimming, white-blue shirts, short jackets, and large white hats."¹¹ The newspaper report shows that in 1882 women were already members of rowing clubs in Bohemia, male athletes were able to appreciate their performance (albeit somewhat condescendingly), and that the reporter did not fail to provide a detailed description of their clothing. He made it clear that in women's sports, the aesthetic appeal of the performance was at least as important as the results achieved.

Before the First World War, women's sport in the Czech lands developed similarly to Germany and the Austrian part of the Cisleithanian region. The uni-

⁹ *Das Damen Wettschwimmen in Wien*. [*The ladies swimming competition in Vienna*], *Allgemeine Sport-Zeitung*, "Organ für alle Sportzweige" 1881 no. 2, August 4, p. 426.

¹⁰ *Lawn Tennis und Golf*, Ausschreibungen Prag. "Allgemeine Sport-Zeitung, Organ für alle Sportzweige" 1895, no. 16, August 18, p. 848.

¹¹ *Veslařské závody v Roudnici*. (1882). [*Rowing Competition in Roudnice*], "Národní listy", September 1, www.digitalniknihovna.cz/mzk/view/uuid:2az5c55170-6079-11dc-860a-0013e6840575 [January 15, 2021].

ying element for the development of sport in Germany and Austria became the regulations on games (1882 and 1890), which called for supplementing floor and equipment exercises in physical education at primary and secondary schools by other forms of movement, especially encouraging the application of ball games.¹² In this context, some physical education teachers, some of whom were also Sokol members, tried to involve sport in the national-emancipation movement by creating its national variants and sought to overcome many Sokol coaches' resistance to organized sports. That was also the origin of the Czech version of handball, which was given its final form by Antonín Křiřtov, the lecturer of games at Charles-Ferdinand University, who founded the Girls' Handball Club in Prague in 1907. The first rules of Czech handball were published in 1910, and the sport discipline received support from the Czech Olympic Committee. The Czech handball court was divided into three fields with attackers allowed only in the middle and offensive zones and defenders, on the contrary, only in the middle and defensive zones. A player was only allowed to take three steps with the ball. The width of the goal, compared to international handball, was also reduced. It was therefore a contactless, physically less demanding game and thus suitable for women. The Sokol organization's leadership also accepted Czech handball by including it in the programmes of the fifth and sixth Sokol Slets as a demonstration sports discipline in 1907 and 1912.¹³ Croatian students who studied at the university in Prague taught Czech handball to their compatriots, and the game was also played in Yugoslavia in the interwar period.

In the Hungarian part of the Habsburg monarchy, unlike in the Czech and Austrian lands, the roots of women's sport stemmed mainly from the pastimes of the aristocracy, which dominated Hungary's social elites. Ladies from aristocratic families loved equestrianism, fencing, and from the 1870s onwards, some of them, of course accompanied by gentlemen, also took up shooting and hiking. After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise in 1867, the Austrian Empress and Queen Elizabeth of Hungary, nicknamed Sisi, who was very fond of the Hungarian aristocratic milieu, became a great role model for Hungarian women of the bourgeoisie. She was considered the most beautiful woman in Europe at the time, she was an excellent horse rider and took part in hunts. Another sports discipline that became very popular was swimming. In 1830, a swimming pool opened on the Danube in Pest, which was regularly reserved only for women. Female swimmers also occasionally took part in long-distance swimming on the Danube, and, by the end of the century, they were no longer absent from swimming competi-

¹² 'Spielerlass' was issued in Germany in 1882 by Gustav von Gossler, Minister of Spiritual Education and Medical Affairs, and in Austria-Hungary in 1890 by the Austrian Minister of Culture and Education, Paul Gautsch von Frankenthurn.

¹³ J. Trantina, *Svátky Ās. Svazu házené a ženských sportů* [The Holiday of the Czechoslovak Association of Handball and Women's Sports], [in:] *Almanach III. Ženských světových her v Praze 6. – 8. Září 1930*, Melantrich, Prague, 32.

tions. At the end of the nineteenth century, as in the Czech, German and Austrian lands, female athletes in Hungary also participated in tennis, skating, and cycling contests.¹⁴

The former Polish kingdom territory was divided between Prussia/Germany, Austria, and Russia from the end of the eighteenth century. The territory relatively least affected by national and political oppression was Galicia, which was under the Austrian administration and belonged to Cisleithania from 1867. The moderate wing of the Polish national movement combined their demands for national emancipation with loyalty to the Austrian throne and found inspiration in Czech politics and the physical education of the Sokol movement. The first Polish Sokol association was founded in Lviv, Galicia, in 1867. In the 1890s, Sokol associations also emerged in the Polish parts of the German Empire and later formed the Union of Polish Sokols in 1893.¹⁵ The opportunities for women's sport, except for gymnastic schools in Warsaw, Krakow, and Lviv, were minimal, and women's sport, as we know it from the Czech lands, Austria, Hungary, and Germany was not constituted in the areas with predominantly Polish population until the First World War.

At the first start of sportswomen at the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris, 'Central Europe' was represented only by Hedviga Resenbaum who won two bronze medals in ladies and mixed tennis doubles. Hedviga Resenbaum came from a German-speaking Jewish family in Prague. In 1896, she married Siegfried Resenbaum, one of the first sports journalists to work in Prague. In her Olympics application, she stated that she is competing for Prague, and she was registered in the Olympic statistics as competing in a mixed team of athletes from various countries.¹⁶

At the 1908 Olympic Games in London, the women's sport in Central Europe was represented by German figure skaters, Anna Hübler and Else Rendschmidt, and four years later by a four-member team of swimmers. Until the First World War, the Games' organizers decided on events in which women could participate. The choice of events (1900 golf and tennis, 1904 archery, 1908 figure skating) corresponded to the types of sports disciplines considered suitable for women. The inclusion of swimming and diving in the Stockholm Olympic Games programme, which brought the participation of 47 women, became a step towards women's sports emancipation. By including women's sports competitions, the

¹⁴ K. Szikora, *Frauensport in Ungarn: Die Entstehung und Entwicklung bis 1938*, [in:] *Turnen und Sport der Frauen in den böhmischen und anderen mitteleuropäischen Ländern, Entstehung und Entwicklung bis zum zweiten Weltkrieg*, [ed.] J. Schütová, M. Waic, National Museum Prague 2003, p. 299–303.

¹⁵ A. Bogucki, *Towarzystwo Gimnastyczne "Sokół" na Pomorzu, 1893–1939* [*Sokol Gymnastic Society in Pomerania, 1893–1939*], Centrum Informacji Nauk. Sokolstwa Polskiego, Bydgoszcz 1997, p. 49.

¹⁶ H. Bartlová, *100 let českého sportu 1918–2018* [*100 years of Czech Sport 1918–2018*], Olympia, Prague 2018, p. 41.

Games' organizers intended to diversify the Olympic Games' overall programme, but the Games were still to remain to the utmost a showcase of the best sports performances. Looking at the early twentieth century's elite sport, it is evident that only men could achieve such performances. The hegemonic masculinity of sport until the First World War was not the only reason for small participation of women in the Olympic Games. The number of women who practised sport, although it continually grew, still remained relatively low. Also, the Olympic Games themselves were still in the process of being shaped.

References

- Bartlová H., *100 let českého sportu 1918–2018 [100 years of Czech Sport 1918–2018]*, Olympia, Prague 2018.
- Bogucki A., *Towarzystwo Gimnastyczne "Sokół" na Pomorzu, 1893–1939 [Sokol Gymnastic Society in Pomerania, 1893–1939]*, Centrum Informacji Nauk. Sokolstwa Polskiego, Bydgoszcz 1997.
- Cyklista: odborný list pro zájmy sportu cyklistického 9 [The Cyclist: an expert paper for those interested in cycling] (1893), p. 35.
- Das Damen Wettschwimmen in Wien [The ladies swimming competition in Vienna]*, "Allgemeine Sport-Zeitung, Organ für alle Sportzweige" 1881, no. 2, August 4, p. 426.
- Jindra Z., Jakubec I., *Hospodářský vzestup českých zemí od poloviny 18. století do konce monarchie [The Economic Rise of the Czech Lands from the Middle of the 18th Century to the End of the Monarchy]*, Karolinum Press, Prague 2015.
- Lawn Tennis und Golf*, Ausschreibungen Prag. "Allgemeine Sport-Zeitung, Organ für alle Sportzweige", 1895, 16, August 18, p. 848.
- Lenderová M., Jiránek T., Macková M., *Z dějin české každodennosti: život v 19. Století [From the History of Czech Everyday Life: Life in the 19th century]*, Karolinum Press, Prague 2017.
- Mauer M., *Vom Mutterland des Sports zum Kontinent: Der Transfer des englischen Sports im 19. Jahrhundert [From the Motherland of Sport to the Continent: the Transfer of English Sport in the 19th century]*, Institut für Europäische Geschichte, Mainz 2011.
- Szikora K., *Frauensport in Ungarn: Die Entstehung und Entwicklung bis 1938*, [in:] *Turnen und Sport der Frauen in den böhmischen und anderen mitteleuropäischen Ländern, Entstehung und Entwicklung bis zum zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. J. Schütová, M. Waic M., National Museum, Prague 2003, p. 299–303.
- Trantina J., *Svátky Čs. Svazuházené a ženských sportů [The Holiday of the Czechoslovak Association of Handball and Women's Sports]*, [in:] *Almanach III.*

Ženských světových her v Praze 6. – 8. Září 1930, Melantrich, Prague 1930, p. 32.

Veslařské závody v Roudnici [*Rowing Competition in Roudnice*], “Národní listy” 1882, September 1, www.digitalniknihovna.cz/mzk/view/uuid:2az5c55170-6079-11dc-860a-0013e6840575 [January 15, 2021].

Waic M., *Tělovýchova a sport ve službách české národní emancipace* [*Physical Education and Sport in the Service of National Emancipation*], Karolinum Press, Prague 2013.

Wedemeyer-Kolwe B., *Frauen im bürgerlichen Kraftsport des Fin Siècle*, “Sport Zeiten” 2019, 19, no. 2, p. 53–66.

Deklaracja braku konfliktu interesów

Autor deklaruje brak potencjalnych konfliktów interesów w odniesieniu do badań, autorstwa i/lub publikacji artykułu *Development of Women’s Sport in Central Europe before the First World War*.

Finansowanie

Autor nie otrzymał żadnego wsparcia finansowego w zakresie badań, autorstwa i/lub publikacji artykułu *Development of Women’s Sport in Central Europe before the First World War*.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of the article *Development of Women’s Sport in Central Europe before the First World War*.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of the article *Development of Women’s Sport in Central Europe before the First World War*.
