

Tomasz Tlusty

A Brief Comparison of Physical Education and Sport within the Czechoslovak and Polish YMCA in the Interwar Years

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Tomáš TLUSTÝ*

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Abstract

This paper looks at the history of physical education and sports in the Czechoslovak and Polish YMCA. As far as physical education and sports are concerned, the two national associations not only developed in a similar way but cooperated in some areas of their activity as well. The two associations were established and began to work together in the 1920s, exchanging printed matter or arranging friendly matches. In the course of time, both of these national associations began to build their own premises equipped with modern sports facilities and their members participated in matches on a regular basis. The origin of the YMCA and the source of money flowing into Czechoslovakia and Poland led to restrictions being placed on both of these national associations as the outbreak of the Second World War drew near. They were later dissolved and were not fully re-established until the 1990s.

Keywords: YMCA, history, interwar Czechoslovakia and Poland, physical education and sport.

Introduction

The YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) was established by George Williams in London on 6 June 1844. He was a draper's assistant, whose original intention was simply to offer young English people a chance to spend free time in line with Christian principles. Consequently, YMCA members initially engaged in common prayer, Bible readings and personal contact¹.

The association's activities soon expanded to include evening lectures. Reading rooms, libraries and teaching rooms were established for its members. As the origi-

* PhDr. Tomáš Tlustý, Ph.D.; University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, Faculty of Education, Department of Sports Studies; e-mail: tomtlusty@pf.jcu.cz

¹ National Archives in Prague, Fund YMCA, Cardboard 4, Signature 8.

nal religious framework gradually expanded to include teaching and physical education, the YMCA gained popularity and entered a period of rapid expansion. Needless to say, its founder was the driving force behind such development².

Thirty years after the YMCA had been established by George Williams in London, Czechoslovakia and Poland were still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The very first Austro-Hungarian YMCA was established in Vienna in 1873 and many Czechs became involved. However, it was not until 13 years later that the first Bohemian group was formed in Prague.

G. Williams visited Prague in 1884 after the Berlin Conference, approaching Albert W. Clark with the idea of establishing the first YMCA there³. The idea was initially rejected but in 1886 the first group called “The Christian Youth Association” was formed⁴. Other groups soon followed in their footsteps⁵. Nine years later, there were apparently eleven groups. Their activity was significantly paralysed by the First World War, though⁶.

Actually, both the Czechoslovak and Polish YMCA can only be said to have been officially established after the end of the First World War, the American YMCA having become active in Central Europe⁷.

Comparison of the Czechoslovak and Polish YMCA in the interwar years

During the First World War, the YMCA took care of soldiers and prisoners of war, arranging free time activities for them or offering opportunities to buy various snacks in their canteens. By doing this, soldiers from different armies encountered the YMCA, whose funds largely originated in the USA. These soldiers were instrumental in spreading YMCA ideas into countries which the association did not yet operate in, including the newly established Czechoslovakia and reinstated Poland.

² J. Konečný, *YMCA: její vznik, dějiny a význam*, Prague 1930, pp. 31–32.

³ A.W. Clark was an American parish priest and pioneer of the Free Reformed Church living in Czechoslovakia. At the time, he had been involved in work with young men for several years.

⁴ In literature, the association is also related to as the “Christian Youth Association”.

⁵ However, there was little physical education and sport in these associations’ programmes. They cannot be compared to those of the YMCA which was present in the area in the interwar years. Moreover, these groups were more oriented towards the English YMCA. Nevertheless, they became members of the World Alliance of YMCAs. After the First World War, the area became embedded with YMCA ideology from the United States of America, where the organisation was oriented in a different way. National Archives in Prague, Fund YMCA, Cardboard 4, Signature 8.

⁶ <http://tensingnachod.wz.cz/ymca.htm.html> [access 14.03.2013].

⁷ *Summary of world war work of the American YMCA (With the soldiers and sailors of America at home, on the sea, and overseas, With the men of the allied armies and with the prisoners of war in all parts of the world)*, New York 1920, p. 132.

It may be claimed that the two national YMCA associations in Czechoslovakia and Poland developed in similar ways. Some of the American secretaries working for this international organisation even proposed that the Czechoslovak and Polish YMCA become attached to foster strong links and close cooperation. However, the Czechoslovak and Polish YMCA do have a number of differing stages of development and events. Needless to say, this is also true of the various local associations operating in interwar Czechoslovakia and Poland.

The YMCA accompanied soldiers returning from the First World War⁸ into both Czechoslovakia⁹ and Poland¹⁰. It was warmly welcomed in a “tolerant” Czechoslovakia but it had to put far more effort into receiving acknowledgement in Catholic Poland as this Protestant organisation was initially repeatedly rejected there¹¹. In both countries, the YMCA first began to cooperate with the army. It began to build soldier’s homes, arrange entertainment for soldiers and offer various food products at reduced prices. However, in the early 1920s, the YMCA ceased to cooperate with the army in both Czechoslovakia¹² and Poland and turned towards the civilian population¹³.

Local groups – number of premises and membership size

Some of the soldier’s homes run by the YMCA were purchased from the army, like the one in České Budějovice, and adapted to become local association premises. Other local associations had to build new premises from scratch or buy them.

This gave rise to one of the main differences between the national YMCA in Czechoslovakia and Poland. The earlier ownership of premises in Czechoslovakia, which the YMCA had taken advantage of from 1921 in České Budějovice, 1923 in Bratislava¹⁴, 1925 in Banská Bystrice¹⁵ and 1928¹⁶ in Prague¹⁷, greatly influenced the way local associations were to develop¹⁸. Quite the opposite, in

⁸ W. Taft, F. Kent, W. Newlin, F. Harris, *Service with fighting men (An Account of the Work of the American YMCA in the World War I)*, Volume II, New York 1922, p. 460.

⁹ Vojenský historický archiv, Fund Ministerstvo národní obrany – presidium, Years 1918–1923, Cardboard 28, č.j. 4584, Odpověď předsedy vlády, ministra financí a ministra národní obrany na interpelaci poslance Böhra a druhů o marnotratném příkazování peněz YMCE.

¹⁰ *Polska YMCA 1923–2003*, Cracow 2003, p. 2.

¹¹ “YMCA (Časopis sdružení YMCA v Československu)” 1925, no. 3, pp. 47–49.

¹² *Vojenský domov (Y.M.C.A. v Československé armádě)*, Prague 1920, pp. 7–8.

¹³ E. Kałamacka, *Kultura fizyczna w programach i działalności Związku Młodzieży Chrześcijańskiej – Polska YMCA w latach 1923–1939* (Dissertation thesis), Cracow 1992, pp. 72–74.

¹⁴ National Archives in Prague, Fund YMCA, Cardboard 7, Signature 24, Repairs, equipment and temporary quarters.

¹⁵ “YMCA (Časopis sdružení YMCA v Československu)” 1926, no. 1, p. 11.

¹⁶ National Archives in Prague, Fund YMCA, Cardboard 2, Signature 6, Table of building expenses (local Y in ČSR – 1923 – 1929).

¹⁷ In addition, the Czechoslovak YMCA built or purchased buildings in Olomouc, Hradec Králové, Kladno, Liberec, Rakovník, Lučenec and Znojmo.

¹⁸ Prague City Archives, Národní výbor hl. m. Prahy, Odbor vnitřních věcí, Spolkový katastr, Cardboard 68, Signature II/511, Československá YMCA, Dopis československé YMCA Policejnímu ředitelství v Praze z 28. září 1921.

Poland, local groups were faced with the problem of not having sites of their own for their activities and having to share premises with others. It was not until 1926¹⁹ that the Polish YMCA established its first office in Cracow, following on in Warsaw – 1932²⁰, Poznań²¹ and Łódź – 1935²². Another significant centre of the Polish YMCA, seated in Gdynia, did not manage to finish building its own premises due to war events. Smaller local associations located in the towns of Ostrolęka, Siedlec, Baranowicze, Brześć n. Bugiem, Białystok, Czeremcha, Jeziory, Lida, Lapy, Łunieniec, Mołodeczno, Nowowilejka, Pińsk, Wilno and Wołkowysk²³ (see Figure 1) did not have their own premises and their activity was mainly conducted in rented premises. Consequently, their physical education and sports activities were not as significant as in the Czechoslovak associations, which predominantly had premises of their own.



Figure 1. A 1935 map showing Czechoslovak and Polish YMCAs in the early 1920s²⁴

In this regard, membership size is a very interesting indicator. In Poland, it took the YMCA a long time to acquire premises of its own (see Figure 2), so it

¹⁹ “Stadjon” 1929, no. 51, p. 15.

²⁰ *Gmach Polskiej YMCA w Warszawie (ruch, program, organizacja)*, Warsaw 1933.

²¹ Unfortunately, we were unable to find information regarding the exact year of its opening and whether it actually owned it (which is most likely) or whether it was just rented.

²² “Łódź w Ilustracji (dodatek niedzielny do “Kurjera Łódzkiego”)” 1937, no. 12, p. 2.

²³ “YMCA (Časopis sdružení YMCA v Československu)” 1925, no. 1–2, pp. 37–38.

²⁴ In Czechoslovakia, the Plzeň YMCA ceased to exist and the Olomouc one was formed, only to be closed down by 1928. In Poland, the YMCA later expanded into Poznań and Gdynia.

was unable to offer its members as good conditions for some parts of its programme as its Czechoslovak counterparts. Despite this, local associations reported larger memberships. To this regard, the largest was the YMCA in Łódź with a membership of almost 970 by 1927, followed by Cracow – 900 members and Warsaw – 735²⁵ members²⁶. The local association in Gdynia was not established until 1932 but the YMCA saw rapid growth there as well, with more than 500 members enrolled by 1938²⁷.

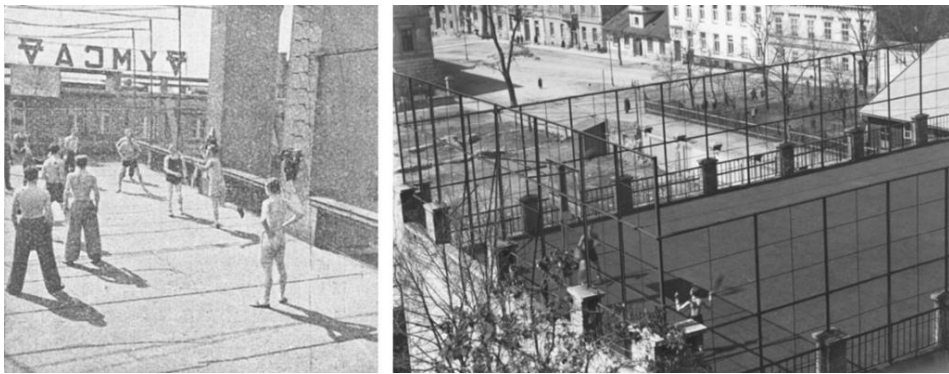


Figure 2. A view of the sports ground on the roof of the YMCA building in Prague and Cracow²⁸

However, if the populations of the towns and cities in question were to be taken into account, the strongest local association would clearly have been in Cracow, with its population of around 220 thousand in 1931. Czechoslovak groups had lower membership numbers than Polish groups. Unfortunately, no details were available regarding the membership size of the Prague group, which must have been one of Czechoslovakia's largest. The Bratislava YMCA reported just over 510 members in 1927, Banská Bystrica 215 and České Budějovice fewer than 140²⁹. If the populations of the cities in question were taken again into account, the strongest Czechoslovak YMCA would have been located in Banská Bystrica, which reported a population of only eleven thousand in 1930³⁰.

The YMCA is most likely to have had larger memberships in Poland because the local associations there offered their members a greater choice of other activities without putting such an emphasis on physical education and sports, as was often the case in Czechoslovakia.

²⁵ "Stadjon" 1928, no. 21, p. 11.

²⁶ In 1925 Łódź had a population of approximately 540 000. There were around 460 000 more inhabitants in Warsaw. Unfortunately, the population of Cracow in the mid 1920s was unavailable. In 1921 it was 183 000.

²⁷ In 1939 the population of Gdynia was 127 000.

²⁸ "Protein" 2006, no. 1, p. 29.

²⁹ *Zpráva o stavu organisace YMCA v ČSR v r. 1927*, Czechoslovakia 1927.

³⁰ In 1930 the population of Bratislava was 124000. Around 44000 people lived in České Budějovice.

Sports

The facilities owned by various local associations in the interwar Czechoslovakia and Poland, along with their membership size, undoubtedly influenced the variety of sports that their members would do and the level they were to achieve.

The YMCA introduced sports that were unknown in the interwar Czechoslovakia and Poland. Its physical education functionaries got involved in promoting them, particularly basketball³¹ and volleyball, two very popular sports today. The YMCA also made efforts to popularise other “American sports” – playground ball³² and baseball³³. To begin with, they were coached in Czechoslovakia mainly by people who had been through the YMCA’s physical education institutions in a variety of countries around the world or by Czech Americans who had experienced these sports during their long stays in the USA³⁴. As for Poland, both Americans working there and members of this international organisation often made efforts to promote these sports³⁵.

Generally speaking, team sports became most popular among YMCA members in both Czechoslovakia and Poland, particularly basketball and volleyball³⁶. A large number of local associations regularly played both of these games during the interwar years. The most successful team in Czechoslovakia was the Prague YMCA³⁷ and the Cracow team was the most successful in Poland³⁸. Members of these two associations encountered each other in several basketball and volleyball clashes during the interwar years. Both teams also achieved victory in their country’s National Championships³⁹ and several of their players went on to take part in the European Championships⁴⁰ and Olympic Games⁴¹. However, no Czechoslovak YMCA volleyball team managed to win a title. The Bratislava YMCA twice came close to achieving that, coming fourth overall⁴². Neverthe-

³¹ T. Tlustý, *Historie basketbalového týmu YMCA Praha v meziválečném období*, “Studia Kinanthropologica” 2012, no. 2, pp. 137–144.

³² “TEP pražské Ymky” 1929, no. 2, p. 6.

³³ “TEP pražské Ymky” 1930, no. 7, p. 7.

³⁴ National Archives in Prague, Fund YMCA, Cardboard 4, Signature 8.

³⁵ “Stadjon” 1932, no. 6, pp. 12–13.

³⁶ T. Drozdek-Małołepsza, *Participation of polish woman in international competition in team sport games in the interwar period*, “Česká kinantropologie” 2016, no. 2, pp. 71–80.

³⁷ T. Tlustý, *Pražská YMCA a její meziválečné basketbalové úspěchy*, [in:] J. Suchý (ed.), *Scientia Movens*, Prague 2015, pp. 174–183.

³⁸ “Raz dwa trzy” 1938, no. 13, p. 6.

³⁹ To this regard, the Prague YMCA was the most successful, its teams (YMCA a Uncas) becoming sole winners of the Czechoslovak Basketball Championships from 1930–1938. T. Tlustý, *Historie basketbalového týmu Uncas Praha v meziválečném období*, “Studia Kinanthropologica” 2012, no. 3, pp. 332–337.

⁴⁰ Archives of YMCA in Czech Republic.

⁴¹ *Polska YMCA ognisko Krakowskie (Sprawozdanie zarządu z działalności za okres I. IV. 1936 – I. III. 1937)*, Cracow 1937, p. 52.

⁴² <http://budovaymca.sk/2013/05/13/budova-ymca-v-bratislave-a-sport/> [access 20.11.2013].

less, the Łódź YMCA in Poland made history by winning the very first Championships⁴³.

Athletics also became popular among Czechoslovak and Polish YMCA members. Czechoslovak groups made a more significant mark on history, particularly České Budějovice⁴⁴ and Banská Bystrica⁴⁵. Most of the other researched groups did athletics without achieving exceptional results in their region.

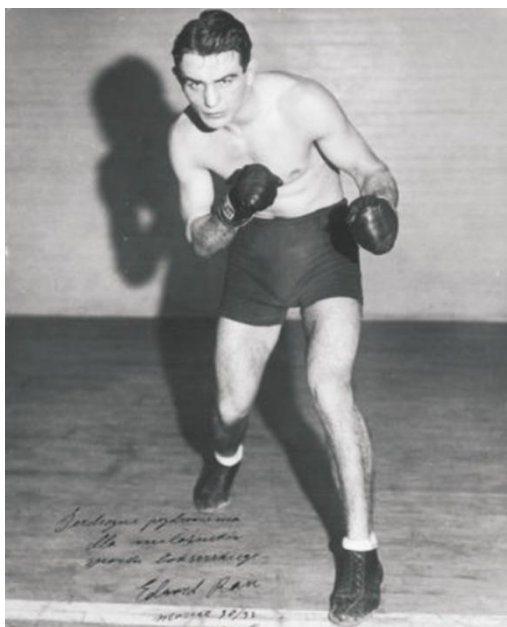


Figure 3. Edward Ran in his boxing pose⁴⁶

YMCA heavy athletics provides another interesting story. Members of most local associations got involved, but did not take part competitively, this being far from true for the České Budějovice and Warsaw YMCAs. The České Budějovice YMCA actually became the bastion of South Bohemian boxing⁴⁷. Unfortunately, its sports department had ceased to exist by 1933⁴⁸. However, members of the Warsaw YMCA achieved even greater results. Local athletes struggled for

⁴³ <http://forum.resovia.rzeszow.pl/index.php?topic=586.0> [access 16.10.2013].

⁴⁴ T. Tlustý, J. Štumbauer, *Nástin historie atletiky ve sportovním odboru YMCA České Budějovice*, “Česká Kinantropologie” 2013, no. 1, pp. 30–43.

⁴⁵ T. Chorvát, *Banská Bystrica a šport v rokoch 1918–1938 (vplyv športu a športových spolkov na mesto a spoločnosť Banskej Bystrice v období I. Československej republiky)*, Banská Bystrica 2005, pp. 26–27.

⁴⁶ http://w655.wrzuta.pl/obraz/5G3kAQRZ0hn/edward_ran [access 16.06.2016].

⁴⁷ “Jihočeské listy” 1924, no. 4, p. 2.

⁴⁸ State Regional Archives in Třeboň, Policejní ředitelství Č. Budějovice, Cardboard 804, Register number 410, Zápis z valné hromady sdružení YMCA dne 10. dubna 1933.

top places at the Polish Championships in both boxing and wrestling⁴⁹ and they were even entered for the Olympic Games⁵⁰. Edward Ran was one of the YMCA's exceptional boxers (see Figure 3). He was a member of the 1929 Polish team at the European Championships⁵¹. Then he went to the United States of America and became a professional boxer⁵². He was the first Polish boxer in history to compete internationally, appearing in Paris as well as in the United States⁵³.

Similarly, the Polish YMCA was clearly more active in canoeing and rowing than the Czechoslovak YMCA⁵⁴. The Cracow and Poznań associations focused on canoeing whereas rowing was more popular in Warsaw⁵⁵. Both Cracow and Warsaw members of the Polish YMCA also had the possibility to use the boatyard on the Vistula⁵⁶. Canoeists from the Polish YMCA actually raced competitively whereas the Prague group, with its boatyard on the Vltava in Prague, canoed on a recreational basis. Prague members mainly used traditional canoes⁵⁷ while the Poles became more involved in kayaking (see Figure 4)⁵⁸.

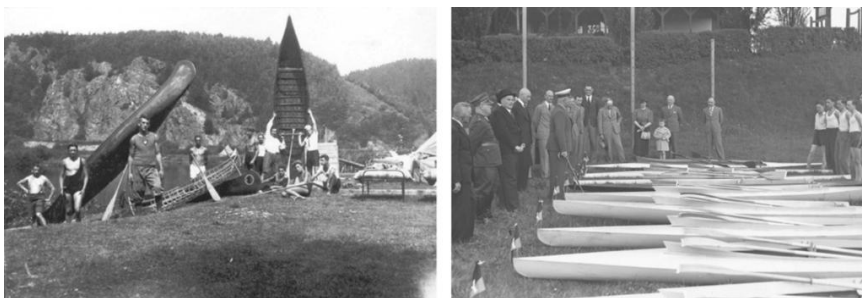


Figure 4. Members of the Czechoslovak YMCA with canoes and members of the Polish YMCA with kayaks⁵⁹

Yachting is another important YMCA water sport and the conveniently located Gdynia YMCA had excellent conditions for it⁶⁰. Members of the Czechoslovak YMCA were also introduced to this sport, the Prague association running a summer camp on Staňkovský Pond in Vlčice⁶¹.

⁴⁹ "Stadjon" 1929, no. 11, p. 6.

⁵⁰ "Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny" 1936, no. 220, p. 23.

⁵¹ "Stadjon" 1929, no. 16, p. 11.

⁵² "Stadjon" 1929, no. 45, p. 2.

⁵³ "Raz dwa trzy" 1931, no. 32, p. 15.

⁵⁴ Archives of local union YMCA in Cracow.

⁵⁵ "Raz dwa trzy" 1933, no. 26, p. 11.

⁵⁶ "Stadjon" 1930, no. 32, p. 5.

⁵⁷ "TEP pražské Ymky" 1931, no. 7, p. 8.

⁵⁸ "Raz dwa trzy" 1934, no. 44, p. 9.

⁵⁹ "Protein" 2006, no. 5, p. 5.

⁶⁰ *Jak pracuje Polska YMCA*, Warsaw 1937.

⁶¹ "TEP pražské Ymky" 1935, no. 7, p. 3.

It is rather surprising that the achievements of YMCA swimmers were not particularly significant, despite some of the local associations having ideal conditions for instruction. YMCA buildings in Prague⁶², Cracow⁶³, Warsaw⁶⁴ and Łódź were equipped with 25 metre indoor swimming pools (see Figure 5)⁶⁵. Cracow swimmers were an exception, though, setting several district records⁶⁶ and doing well at national level⁶⁷. However, the Prague association focused more on lessons for non-swimmers and water rescue training. Like the Warsaw YMCA, it did not get involved in coaching top level swimmers⁶⁸. Unfortunately, the Łódź YMCA was unable to use its pool for long due to it being built late and the oncoming outbreak of the Second World War⁶⁹.

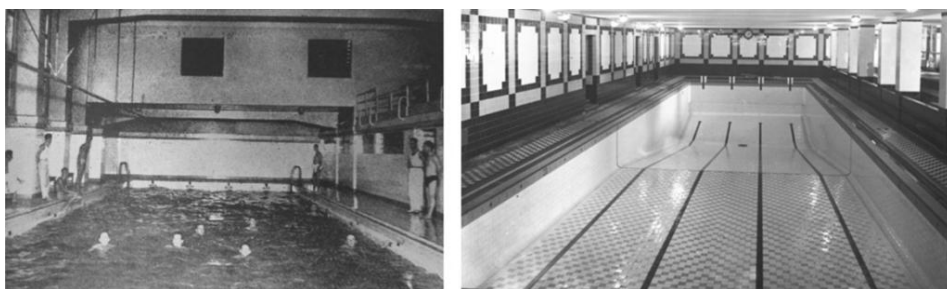


Figure 5. Photographs of the Prague and Cracow associations' swimming pools

Table tennis was another important sport in which the Czechoslovak YMCA players achieved decent results. The Czechoslovak YMCA was most successfully represented by table tennis players from Slovakia. Karol Morávek, who coached in Bratislava, probably became the best table tennis player within the Czechoslovak association⁷⁰. The greatest club success was achieved by Banská Bystrica YMCA⁷¹, which was one of the best Slovakian teams⁷². The Polish YMCA fell slightly behind, not getting involved in table tennis to such an extent. Individual players did not manage such achievement within their provinces, nor

⁶² "TEP pražské Ymky" 1928, no. 1, p. 3.

⁶³ *Polska Instytucja Narodowo-Spoleczna we własnym domu (Polska YMCA Związek Młodzieży Chrześcijańskiej w Krakowie)*, Cracow 1927.

⁶⁴ *Polska YMCA Związek Młodzieży Chrześcijańskiej (1923 – 8. XII – 1938)*, Warsaw 1939, p. 24.

⁶⁵ "Łódź w Ilustracji (dodatek niedzielny do „Kurjera Łódzkiego“)" 1937, no. 12, p. 2.

⁶⁶ "Raz dwa trzy" 1934, no. 27, s. 2–3.

⁶⁷ "Raz dwa trzy" 1935, no. 44, s. 14.

⁶⁸ "TEP pražské Ymky" 1930, no. 4, s. 3.

⁶⁹ *Polska YMCA w czasie wojny i okupacji*, Warsaw 1947, pp. 4–5.

⁷⁰ Karol Morávek was the Slovak number one from 1926–1936. Between 1930 and 1933 he even played for the Czechoslovak team. His greatest achievement was 5th – 8th place at the World Championships in 1932.

⁷¹ "STAR" 1929, no. 14.

⁷² "Almanach sportu a tělesné výchovy na rok 1936" 1936, p. 120.

did they enjoy great success at national level. The Warsaw YMCA seems to have been the most successful in that regard⁷³.

In the winter months, the YMCA ran ski courses for members in both Czechoslovakia⁷⁴ and Poland, offering instruction at both beginner and advanced levels. The Polish association also organised ski trips for its members, including a competition by points for participants⁷⁵.

Apart from the above mentioned sports that were very popular at national YMCA level in interwar Czechoslovakia and Poland, each particular group offered a whole range of other sports that its members got involved in to a much lesser extent, for a relatively short time or without a great deal of local inter-team competition and, if so, with no great success. It was more about different groups of members from various associations competing against each other. Some sports were offered by a number of local associations, for example archery, football, playgroundball, baseball, fencing, water polo, tennis, ice skating and ice hockey, cycling and a variety of gymnastics exercises⁷⁶. Other sports were uncommon, but some associations offered unconventional sports like rugby at the Bratislava YMCA⁷⁷, 300m rifle shooting in Cracow⁷⁸ and horse-riding and jiu-jitsu in Prague⁷⁹.

Games that did not require a lot of space were also popular in both national YMCAs, for example chess or pool, with tournaments often being held⁸⁰.

Summer and winter camps

Physical education and sport in Czechoslovakia and Poland also greatly benefited from the YMCA's summer camps, where participants spent part of their summer holidays under the supervision of experienced physical education functionaries⁸¹. Physical education and sport were an integral part of summer camps and those run by the YMCA significantly contributed to the popularisation of new "American sports", both in Czechoslovakia and Poland. Camp Olympics were an essential part of YMCA summer camps, mainly consisting of track and field events⁸².

Bathing is an inseparable part of the summer camp but those participants who could not swim had to be supervised. This led to the decision that camp

⁷³ "Przegląd Sportowy" 1932, no. 11, p. 5.

⁷⁴ "TEP pražské Ymky" 1931, no. 7, pp. 7–8.

⁷⁵ "Wiadomości ogniska krakowskiego Polskiej YMCA" 1934, January, p. 2.

⁷⁶ "YMCA (Časopis sdružení YMCA v Československu)" 1923, no. 4–5, p. 141.

⁷⁷ "Almanach sportu na rok 1929–1930" 1929–1930, p. 75.

⁷⁸ *Polska YMCA ognisko Krakowskie (Sprawozdanie zarządu z działalności za okres 1. IV. 1936 – 1. III. 1937)*, Cracow 1937, p. 53.

⁷⁹ "TEP pražské Ymky" 1930, no. 1, pp. 4–6.

⁸⁰ "TEP pražské Ymky" 1936, no. 4, p. 4.

⁸¹ *Almanach letního tábora YMCA Sázava 1933*, Prague 1933, p. 3.

⁸² "YMCA (Časopis sdružení YMCA v Československu)" 1924, no. 2, p. 65.

leaders would attempt to teach every participant to swim. The most able swimmers were subsequently trained to rescue drowning victims⁸³.



Figure 6. View of the Masaryk Camp on the River Sázava and the Beskid Camp outside the town of Mszana Dolna⁸⁴

At that time, summer camps in both Czechoslovakia and Poland were mostly run on a seasonal basis. However, both national YMCAs finally began to transform their camps into permanent ones. The YMCA thus greatly contributed to introducing the tradition of permanent summer camps⁸⁵ in both Czechoslovakia and Poland (see Figure 6)⁸⁶.

However, YMCA summer camps were slower to take off in interwar Poland than in Czechoslovakia, where the first summer camps had been built in the early 1920s⁸⁷. This goes for quantity as well, the Polish YMCA managed to open only four permanent summer camps – Beskid, Mszane Dolne⁸⁸, Pilica, Pilica Kurnędz nad Pilicou near Sulejow⁸⁹, Linda, on the brook of the same name near Łódź⁹⁰ and Wieżyca nad Jeziorem Ostrzyce summer camp⁹¹. By the end of the

⁸³ A letter sent to the Ministry of Social Welfare states that around 1600 water rescuers were trained and around 3000 non-swimmers were taught how to swim in the 23 year history of the summer camp. National Archives in Prague, Fund YMCA, Cardboard 5, Signature 13, Dopis organizace YMCA Ministerstvu sociální péče z 15. září 1947.

⁸⁴ J.A. First, *Cesty kratší i delší*, Beroun 2011, p. 214. *Polska YMCA 1923–2003*, Cracow 2003, p. 6.

⁸⁵ National Archives in Prague, Fund YMCA, Cardboard 3, Signature 6, Stručná zpráva o letním táboře liberecké YMCA u Kumru (okres Mimoň).

⁸⁶ “Stadjon” 1930, no. 1, p. 14.

⁸⁷ J.V. Hynek, *Sport a tábory YMCA v období první republiky*, [in:] J.V. Hynek (ed.), *YMCA v proměnách času*, Prague 2011, p. 41.

⁸⁸ “Polska (Lato młodzieży polskiej)” 1937, no. 26, p. 5.

⁸⁹ *Polska YMCA 1923–2003*, Cracow 2003, p. 6.

⁹⁰ Some years later, this camp was sold to the Łódź German Gymnasium. J. Jaroszewski, M. Łuczak, *Kultura fizyczna w programach Łódzkiego Oddziału Związku Młodzieży Chrześcijańskiej (YMCA) w latach 1920–2002*, “Kultura Fizyczna (Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie)” 2014, no. 2, pp. 95–113.

⁹¹ *Polska YMCA Związek Młodzieży Chrześcijańskiej (1923 – 8. XII – 1938)*, Warsaw 1939, p. 33.

1930s, the Czechoslovak YMCA had opened a substantially higher number of facilities⁹².

The first camp – Sázava – was established by the Czechoslovak YMCA in 1921 and it was run by the local Prague association. More camps were soon established by other local associations – Orava by the Bratislava YMCA, Devět mlýnů – Podyjí by YMCA Znojmo, Hvězdov u Mimoně by YMCA Liberec and Veveří Bítýška (now Veverská) by YMCA Brno. In addition to those, the YMCA established weekend camps in Kroměříž – Jablůnka, Bratislava – Kameň and Banská Bystrica – Seton – Lubietová⁹³.

Campsites became particularly abundant in the 1930s. Apart from those already mentioned, the Zdobnice v Orlických horách summer camp was opened in 1935, followed by the Nižbor (Žloutkovice) camp between the towns of Nižbor and Žloutkovice on the River Berounka, Kumer near Mimoň, Karpaty in the Little Carpathian Mountains and Vlčice near Staňovský Pond. By 1937, there were twelve camps in operation, with more to come over time⁹⁴. In 1939, the Plzeň YMCA managed to open its “Zlatá řeka” summer camp near the town of Vráž in the district of Písek⁹⁵.

An interesting fact is, though, that the Polish YMCA made use of its camp premises in winter as well and organised so-called winter camps, which were almost solely focused on skiing⁹⁶. However, the Czechoslovak YMCA were not able to organise more than one single winter camp in Mísečky in the Krkonoše mountain range⁹⁷. Skiing was much more popular among Polish members than among members of the Czechoslovak YMCA.

Interruption of activities

The history of both national YMCAs also followed similar patterns from 1939 to date. Before the Second World War, a number of inhabitants still perceived the YMCA as a foreign, American organisation. This was the case even despite the fact that the American YMCA had mainly operated there during the first half of the 1920s. It must be acknowledged, though, that American secretaries were actually operating in both countries throughout the interwar years, even though both national YMCAs had already become completely independent.

Considering the way the YMCA was introduced in Czechoslovakia and Poland, its origin and the source of its funding during the interwar years, it could

⁹² T. Tlustý, *Tělesná výchova a sport na letních táborech organizace YMCA v Československu*, “Studia Kınanthropologica” 2013, no. 1, pp. 59–67.

⁹³ National Archives in Prague, Fund YMCA, Cardboard 1, Signature 4, Zpráva o programové sociálně výchovné činnosti YMKY v ČSR v roce 1928.

⁹⁴ H. Černá, *YMCA jako středisko výchovy mládeže v Československu 1919–1951* (Graduation thesis), České Budějovice 2009, p. 80.

⁹⁵ *Almanach letního tábora „Zlatá řeka“ na Otavě 1940*, Pilsen 1940, p. 3.

⁹⁶ “Stadjon” 1930, no. 3, p. 10.

⁹⁷ *Almanach prázdninových táborů libereckého sdružení YMCA – 1937*, Liberec 1937.

not have been “a bed of roses” in these two Central European countries in the fifty years that followed.

The various premises owned by the YMCA in Poland and in the torn-up Czechoslovakia of 1938⁹⁸ gradually began to be occupied and made use of by the Germans⁹⁹. Such was also the fate of most of the organisation’s camp premises¹⁰⁰.

In both Czechoslovakia and Poland, the YMCA had to wait until the Second World War was over before it could resume activity. However, the re-established Czechoslovak YMCA was not to remain the same as it had been prior to the war, because it was reinstated in Slovakia as the “YMCA in Slovakia”¹⁰¹.

Both national associations could recommence activity, although not fully, due to the fact that some of their premises had been damaged. Members of the YMCA again began to attend gym and sporting events. Everything seemed to be turning for the better.

However, the YMCA did not remain active for long in Czechoslovakia and Poland. In 1949, the association in Poland was labelled “a Buergoise-Fascist tool supported and influenced by foreign principles and factors” and dissolved¹⁰². Two years later, it was officially dissolved in Czechoslovakia¹⁰³. Neither the YMCA in Poland nor the association in Czechoslovakia were fully re-established until the 1990s.

Conclusion

The Czechoslovak and Polish YMCA developed in a very similar way, their physical education and sport programmes being no exception. They originated at the same time, provided, apart from a few exceptions, almost the same sports, were instrumental to the promotion of “American” sports in their country, achieved their greatest sporting success in basketball, contributed to introducing the tradition of permanent summer camps in their country, were dissolved in the same era and even similarly reinstated.

⁹⁸ National Archives in Prague, Fund YMCA, Cardboard 1, Signature 1, Informace pro jednání Ú.A.V. (návrh p. L.D. Aplina).

⁹⁹ E. Kałamacka, *Kultura fizyczna w programach i działalności Związku Młodzieży Chrześcijańskiej – Polska YMCA w latach 1923–1939* (Dissertation thesis), Cracow 1992, pp. 283–289.

¹⁰⁰ National Archives in Prague, Fund YMCA, Cardboard 1, Signature 1, Zpráva o činnosti pro XX. Výroční sjezd Ymky v Československu.

¹⁰¹ I. Sedliačik, *Od začiatku po začiatok (Činnosť YMCA Banská Bystrica v rokoch 1919–1999)*, Banská Bystrica 2004, pp. 6–8.

¹⁰² M. Kardas, *Zarys dziejów „Polskiej YMCA“ i jej gdyńskiego ogniska w latach 1932–1950*, “Zeszyty Gdyńskie (Tożsamość kulturowo-cywilizacyjna Gdyni)” 2010, no. 1, pp. 115–136.

¹⁰³ Archives of YMCA in Czech Republic, Ústřední výbor YMCA Ústřednímu výboru Československého svazu mládeže dne 12. března 1951. National Archives in Prague, Fund YMCA, Cardboard 6, Signature 19, Účtárna Ministerstva práce a sociální péče – V likvidaci, dne 4. dubna 1951.

During the interwar years, the Czechoslovak YMCA witnessed a bigger “boom” than the Polish YMCA. That was clearly related to more generous financial support, both from the state and from abroad. As a result, the Czechoslovak YMCA owned more buildings and summer camps. Moreover, the interwar Czechoslovakia was more than twice as small as interwar Poland. Consequently, various smaller Czechoslovak local associations were more active than their Polish counterparts at republic-level sport.

Unfortunately, the accessed materials did not allow good comparison of the number of members in the Czechoslovak and Polish YMCA. Sources from 1927, which lack more accurate references to the Prague association, state that the more significant Polish association had, on average, a more numerous membership than the Czechoslovak association. Nevertheless, the YMCA was far more developed in a number of smaller towns in Czechoslovakia and would most likely have outdone the Polish in an overall comparison of membership numbers.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, their activity significantly decreased and later disappeared completely. The Germans began to occupy and make use of their premises and physical education and sports facilities.

After the war, despite problems caused by loss of or significant damage to their property, both national associations renewed their activity. This was not to last for long, though.

As soon as the Communists came to power in the two countries, their activity was again restricted. Clearly, the problem was again in their origin, their stance, and the source of their funding. Both national associations were again dissolved at the turn of the 1950s and their property was confiscated by the state. During the Prague Spring, the Czechoslovak YMCA again made efforts to renew its activity but in vain, as Czechoslovakia was invaded by troops of the five Warsaw Pact nations. This led to dissolution of all associations that had been or were being re-established in Czechoslovakia¹⁰⁴.

As a consequence, both Polish and Czechoslovak YMCA had a long wait before restrictions imposed on their activity were lifted. It was not until the early 1990s that they were again free to recommence activity with no time limitations. However, the association has been unable to fully re-establish operations in either of the two countries¹⁰⁵, as it has not been returned either the confiscated premises or the permanent camps that it had formerly owned¹⁰⁶. Nor has it received compensation for them¹⁰⁷. As a result, neither the Czechoslovak nor the Polish YMCA has managed to build on its interwar traditions and achievements.

¹⁰⁴ J. Kössl, J. Štumbauer, M. Waic, *Vybrané kapitoly z dějin tělesné kultury*, Prague 2004, p. 150.

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.ymca.cz/info-o-ymca/poslani/> [access 22.05.2014].

¹⁰⁶ http://www.lubogoszcz.pl/o_nas/historia/ [access 23.05.2014].

¹⁰⁷ M. Kardas, *Zarys dziejów “Polskiej YMCA” i jej gdyńskiego ogniska w latach 1932–1950*, “Zeszyty Gdyńskie (Tożsamość kulturowo-cywilizacyjna Gdyni)” 2010, no. 1, pp. 115–136.

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Krótkie porównanie wychowania fizycznego i sportu w czechosłowackiej i polskiej YMCA w okresie międzywojennym

Streszczenie

W pracy omawiana jest historia kultury fizycznej i sportu w czechosłowackiej oraz polskiej YMCA. Te dwie krajowe organizacje nie tylko rozwijały się w podobny sposób, ale nawet współpracowały w niektórych obszarach swojej działalności związanej z wychowaniem fizycznym i sportem. Obydwa związki zostały powołane do życia i rozpoczęły współpracę w 1920 roku, wymieniając się literaturą i organizując mecze towarzyskie. W miarę upływu czasu, stowarzyszenia budowały swoje własne pomieszczenia wyposażone w nowoczesne zaplecze sportowe, a ich członkowie uczestniczyli regularnie w meczach. Pochodzenie YMCA jak i źródło pieniędzy płynących do organizacji w Czechosłowacji i Polsce były, po wybuchu II wojny światowej, powodem ograniczenia działalności obu tych związków krajowych. Współpraca organizacji została zerwana, a jej przywrócenie nastąpiło dopiero w latach 90. XX wieku.

Słowa kluczowe: YMCA, historia, Czechosłowacja i Polska międzywojenna, wychowanie fizyczne i sport.