

# Renata Włoch, Aleksandra Gołdys

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Renata Włoch<sup>1</sup> & Aleksandra Gołdys<sup>2</sup>

## The transformation of the public sports policy: politics, grassroots management and social capital of the *Orlik* programme in Poland

In 2008–2013 the Polish local authorities, with the financial support of the central and regional authorities, built 2604 small sport facilities all around the country. This kind of public policy – at such a large scale, completed in a very short time, addressed to amateurs, standardized, financed fully from public resources (and in half from the central budget) is unparalleled in any other country, so from the scientific perspective can be treated as an exceptional experiment. It is also impossible to compare this policy to any other – since nowadays vast majority of the big public investments in sport focus on stadiums (Hallman 2013). We propose that those sport facilities be treated as new institutions introduced top-down in specific social and political reality and that the process of their development in the local and national context may serve as a kind of observatory of social and, particularly, institutional change. In the article we analyse the evolution of the *Orlik* programme which at the beginning was treated as a supplement to the country's preparations for the UEFA Euro 2012, but quite unexpectedly contributed to the strengthening of social capital in Poland. The research shows that the crucial factor of the functioning of *Orlik* pitches was the grassroots social and managerial potential of a newly created professional class of local sport instructors. The *Orlik* programme is also a case of institutional learning on the side of central governmental institutions, such as the Ministry of Sport. The article contributes to the body of knowledge concerning the management of local sport infrastructure in the context of the relations between local and central authorities, and more generally, to the sociology of institutional and social change.

**Key words:** sociology of sport, sports policy, institutional change

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<sup>1</sup> Uniwersytet Warszawski; r.wloch@uw.edu.pl.

<sup>2</sup> Uniwersytet Warszawski; a.goldys@uw.edu.pl.

## 1. Introduction: the background of the *Orlik* programme

Apart from its obvious positive impact, the collapse of Communism in Poland triggered numerous negative processes. Since 1980 free public sport infrastructure – small football pitches, swimming pools, track and field facilities, etc. – has gradually sunk into deterioration (Wolańska et al. 2002). Anecdotally, in many Polish towns and cities, including Warsaw, the city stadium became synonymous with a kind of an open-air market where people from Vietnam and post-Soviet countries would sell cheap goods. The infrastructural breakdown coincided with a rise in social divisions in the Polish society, until then permeated with the egalitarian Communist ideology (Brzeziński, Jancewicz, Letki 2013). Sport activity started to become a manifestation of a class affiliation, the lifestyle of the middle class whose members could afford to pay for a private gym or private judo lessons for their offspring, confirming the theoretical assumptions of P. Bourdieu (as shown by Lenartowicz 2013). Consequently, by 2004 Poland was already one of the European countries worst equipped in sport infrastructure and with plunging levels of sport activity. According to the Eurobarometer survey (2004) on sports, as many as 62% of Poles declared that they performed sports – if at all – ‘elsewhere’, that is to say not in the dedicated sport facilities (not in sport clubs, gyms, sport centres, at schools or universities), which according to Żyśko (2013) presented a major barrier to physical activity. In 2013 only 4 out of 10 Poles regularly engaged in physical activities of any kind (CBOS 2013).

In April 2007, Poland and Ukraine were granted the right to host UEFA EURO 2012 – the third biggest sport events in the world. The Polish society was truly thrilled and the political elites saw the process of the preparation as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to hasten the pace of the economic development by numerous infrastructural investments in large sport facilities (at the time Poland had no stadiums conforming with the UEFA standards) and in transport. But not only that: in September the newly appointed Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced a large-scale programme to build small football pitches in each of the 2479 Polish communities (*gmina*). The main aim was to construct at least 2012 sport complexes in order to celebrate the UEFA Euro 2012. The new government justified their ambitious plan by referring to a clear but bleak diagnosis of the status quo in the field of sport policy: ‘One of the problems of recent years has been the lack of a clear vision for sports infrastructure development in Poland. Development is chaotic and construction projects are often excessively costly. It is obvious that there is a shortage of modern sports facilities’ (Ministry of Sport and Tourism 2008). The government, notwithstanding its centre-right orientation, seemed to subscribe to an egalitarian vision of the social policy, claiming that ‘One of the key tasks of the State is to ensure that citizens are able to practice sports, regardless of their financial or social status. Hence, the forms in which sport is offered should be attractive enough to encourage as many people as possible to take up sport. (...) Promotion of a healthy lifestyle is one of the most important objectives

and should be pursued with determination. Development of sports infrastructure will be very important in this context. We intend to put much emphasis on the promotion of an active lifestyle, including family sports competitions and weekends with sport and tourism' (Ministry of Sport and Tourism 2008). The general aim of the programme was to contribute to the promotion of a healthy lifestyle by the development of the sport infrastructure. The main operational goal amounted to the development of physical activity among children and the youth under the watchword of 'healthy and smiling children are our priority'.

The assumptions of the programme presented by the Ministry of Sport were quite simple. Local communities could apply for co-financing for the construction of a small sport complex consisting of two undersized artificial pitches (a football one and a multifunctional one), equipped with toilets and a locker room. The Ministry provided the general architectural design (which in the first wave of the programme in 2009–2010 could not be modified by the local authorities), a standard timesheet and imposed rules concerning the tender procedure and legal agreements with subcontractors. The total cost of the construction of a typical *Orlik* amounted to 250.000 Euros; one-third of the sum was covered by the regional authorities, the other third by the Ministry of Sport, and the local government had to put up the rest, often with the support of external sources of financing (e.g. EU cohesion funds). All in all, the central government allocated circa 230 million Euros of public money for the programme (OECD 2013). The costs of the further functioning of the *Orliks* were to be covered by the local authorities alone (amounting to ca 14.000 Euros per year). The pitches became the property of the local authority, but the Ministry required them to be open to everybody and totally free-of-charge for ten consecutive years. The local authorities were obliged to hire sport instructors, though they could apply to the Ministry of Sport for co-financing of his or her salary up to 1000 Polish zlotys per month (ca 250 Euros). The response from the local communities exceeded the expectations. Between the years 2008 and 2011 more than 2270 *Orliks* were built, the first one opened to the public in June 2008. The programme was finalised in 2013 with 2604 *Orliks* all over Poland.

## 2. The methodology of the research

The analysis presented in this article is based on the data gathered during four periods of research into the functioning of *Orlik* pitches, carried out between 2009 and 2014. The first piece of the explorative research was conducted in 2009 through a series of case studies in 20 *Orliks* located in 10 provinces ('voivodships'). This sample selection was intentional, with half of the cases located in rural areas or in small villages, and the other half – in larger towns or cities. The research methods consisted of desk research (finding information about *Orlik* pitches in local press and on local government's websites), participatory observation on the

pitches, and in-depth interviews (IDI) with key people involved (sport instructors, managers of the sport facilities, representatives of local government, people using sport facilities, local inhabitants). The second part of the research was carried in autumn of 2011; it focused on the development of soft skills programmes carried out using the sport infrastructure. The sample was random and representative. The quantitative part of the research consisted of computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI) in 120 localities; in each locality the researchers carried out two interviews: one with a representative of the local government, the second with a sport instructor working on an *Orlik*. All in all, 23 interviews were completed. The qualitative part was carried out in 20 localities: it consisted of two IDIs in each locality and a group interview with the local inhabitants in every second locality. The third section of the research was carried out in October–November 2013. It consisted of 14 case studies (desk research; interviews with managers, instructors and users of the complexes; participatory observation) in purposive selection. The research questions concerned: the area of the *Orlik*, the management of the facilities and their maintenance, the sport activities offered by the *Orlik*, the type of the instructor, and the sport policies in the local community. The collecting of the data during the case studies was completed by the data from a web questionnaire using a sample of 174 *Orlik* instructors (non-representative, the instructors who participated in a series of workshops organized by the Foundation for the Development of Sports Culture in November 2013), and by the data (from interviews, group discussions, observations) gathered during the workshops. The results of the research were presented in the format of a SWOT analysis of the *Orlik* programme to be used by the sport authorities in order to create a strategy to support its further functioning. All in all, the qualitative field research (interviews and participatory observation) was carried out on 54 separate *Orlik* pitches. The fourth part of the research consisted of 150 case studies of *Orlik* pitches and short CATIs conducted on 2300 instructors over 9 months (March–November) in 2014.

It needs to be emphasised that the authors endorse the ideals of engaged and practical sociology. When it comes to sociology of sport, they agree with Ian Henry's and Ling-Mei Ko's (2014) statement that in the area of sport policy, the research *of* policy is more often than not a research *for* policy. All the four aforementioned pieces of research were carried for institutions which shape sport policy in Poland (especially the Ministry of Sport and Tourism) and resulted in recommendations concerning the social functions and management of *Orlik* pitches that were – to some extent – introduced by those institutions. Consequently, the researchers were active participants in the processes of institutional and social change, striving to introduce the ideas of evidence-based social policy in the area of sport. At the same time, they repeatedly encountered the classic epistemological and methodological dilemmas of neutrality and engagement (Elias 1987). The multitude of roles that the researchers had to take up resulted also from the underdevelopment of sociology of sport in Poland and the lack of external expertise in this field. Having admitted all the methodological shortcomings of their

research, the authors beg that their observations be treated as a result of extended ethnographic shadowing (Czarniawska-Joerges 1998) and an explorative preliminary diagnosis of specific social and political reality that needs to be analysed more thoroughly in the future. For example, more accurate quantification of the trends of *Orliks'* development in the context of sport-for-all policy and the levels of sport performance and participation seems to be required.

### 3. The infrastructure and the political overtones of the programme

As mentioned above, the *Orlik* project was announced as an addition to the country's preparation for EURO 2012. Clearly, it's not well hidden agenda was to emphasise the thrust for the reforms and the political powers of the newly appointed government. Due to the sheer scale of the investment, the cost of the programme (in total circa 832 million Euros) and its formula (the engagement of the all three levels of governance: central, regional and local), the project became the object of social, media and political discourse. The ruling party stressed its functionality in reference to the development of sport for all and the health of the younger generation (it is worth stressing that massive decline of physical activity among the youth in Poland is one of the most intense social processes, as noted by Mazur 2011). The opposition argued that it came down to being a public relations, or worse, a populist move on the side of the government, because – given all the taxed imposed on the central subsidy – the programme was financed mainly by the local and regional authorities, while the central authorities took all the credit (Portal Samorządowy 2009). Some critics spitefully pointed out that the personal sympathies of the newly appointed Prime Minister – a keen amateur football player and a fan – may have played the decisive role in setting pitches over, for example, gyms or track-and-field facilities.

Critical voices apart, it is not difficult to demonstrate that the assumptions and the realisation of the programme were dictated by the political reasons. According to the political vision of the government, the country was to be covered by a network of standardised, identical, government financed sport infrastructure. The decision makers at the highest level wanted to create a recognisable flagship brand manifesting the governmental thrust for reforms. Accordingly, *Orlik* project was based on the inflexible architectural designs, bought by the Ministry and imposed on local communities who were not allowed to introduce any changes, despite their contextual divergences and different needs. For example, for many of the *Orliks* built near schools it would have been cheaper to use the school's restroom and locker room facilities. However, the Ministry required the restrooms and lockers to be built. Some of the localities wanted to build full-size pitches (useful for the organisation of professional tournaments), but again, the general design of the programme made it impossible, even if they could afford it. In some

cases the original maintenance costs of the obligatory artificial surface proved to be particularly burdensome. According to the official design, there was only one entrance to the pitch, so in some cases the users just tore the fence to be able to enter in more convenient places. Additionally, the Ministry imposed the legal format of the contracts to be signed with subcontractors, which arguably harmed the cost-effectiveness of the project, as the local governments could not enter into negotiations with the building contractors on individual conditions.

The decision to build or not to build *Orliks* quite often had political undertones. In localities where most of the councillors belonged to opposition parties, a negative decision was often treated as an insubordination towards the ruling party (Sądecczanin Info 2012). In many cases, though, local authorities eagerly applied for the governmental subsidy, usually without any kind of SWOT analysis or even a simple estimate of the benefits and costs of building an *Orlik*. Cases of rationally grounded decisions were rare: for example, the authorities of one of the local communities from a relatively poor region of Poland estimated that a multifunctional grass pitch would have almost all the same functions as an *Orlik* complex with an artificial grass, but with 20 times less money, so they decided not to enter the programme. In most cases the decision was almost automatic; as one of the interviewees said: 'There was a programme, so we jumped in'. There was no reflection on the cost-effectiveness; no search for alternatives; no evaluation of the potential sporting and social impact; no analysis of the optimal place to build an *Orlik* (as a result in many cases the *Orliks* are not distributed evenly; for example, in one midsize town there are districts where the pitches virtually border on one another, and districts with no sport infrastructure at all). Finally, there usually were no consultations with the local citizens as to the idea itself and the location of the complexes. The 'politicisation' – the centralised character of the decision (top-down), neglect of participatory mechanisms, focus on the *building* of the complex as the final indication of a success and not on its further functioning – naturally hastened the impressive pace of the programme, but at the same time contributed to its many drawbacks.

In the first stage of the *Orlik* programme, regardless of the high-flown declarations of the government announced on the official website of the Ministry, the frantic building effort completely obscured any reflection on the aims of this infrastructural policy. The decision makers at each governmental level focused on bragging about the number of complexes (for a long time not supported by any data on their geographical distribution), talking about the numbers and financing of the sport instructors, and stressing the potential huge benefits of the free of charge, open for all sport infrastructure. Discussion concerning its exact functions, models of management, methodological support for instructors and local governments participating in the programme was virtually non-existent. It is worth noting that the Ministry did not try to control the geographical distribution of the *Orliks*: the subsidy was not conditioned on the number of already functioning sport facilities in the neighbourhood. As a consequence, more *Orliks*

were constructed in those localities that had already worked out their sport policy and often had quite a decent level of infrastructure development. Admittedly, the final number of *Orliks* far exceeded the number of local communities (the initial goal of the programme), but about one third of all communities did not enter the programme. 40% of those that did not enter were rural. There are large disparities in the number of *Orliks* between the more affluent districts of western and central Poland and those located in the less developed eastern Poland: the poorer districts found it difficult to provide the necessary financial input (Żółtak 2012).

The officially declared objectives of the *Orlik* programme were as ambitious (development of sport for all, particularly for children and the youth, contribution to a healthy lifestyle) as they were vague, and the Ministry of Sport did not provide any instructions as to how to achieve them. Although the programme was to be a remedy for the chaos and the lack of a consistent plan of the sport infrastructure development, and the issue of its future was constantly raised during the working meetings in the Ministry, there was no specific strategy concerning the follow up. Symptomatically, as mentioned above, up to 2012 the Ministry did not even have an overview of the programme, as there was no overall data concerning the distribution of *Orliks* or the facilities they offered. In practice, the Ministry required the *Orliks* to be kept in order and used to the full – how it was supposed to happen was not a subject of a deeper reflection.

The bulk of the managerial interest of the Ministry concentrated on monitoring the financing of the salaries for instructors (which resulted in a lot of tedious paperwork for the latter: e.g. they had to fill in by hand detailed timetables, sometimes in several copies – for the local authorities, regional sport organisations responsible for the distribution of funds, and for the Ministry). Usually, the Ministry reacted summarily to bottom-up proposals or criticism. For example, when the media attacked the masculine character of the programme – the first versions of all the promotional materials and the website showed only boys playing football – tournaments under the patronage of the Prime Minister Donald Tusk started to include female teams (in the form of a parallel tournament).

#### 4. Learning through functioning: the emerging grassroots management of the *Orlik* pitches

The lack of a general managing strategy at the central level had to be compensated at lower level. But the local governments usually also had no clue how to run the shiny new infrastructure – the common view was that they somehow would run themselves. Most of the local governments acted quite passively as mere recipients of the governmental programme, not its owners. In 2010 65% of local decision makers declared that they did not have any specific plans concerning the *Orliks* (34% claimed they had the will to extend the offer of sport activities and employ



more instructors); the lion's share of the local sport budget was spent on the maintenance of the infrastructure (Projekt Społeczny 2012, 2012).

To understand the context of the functioning of the *Orliks*, it is important to mention that from the beginning they formed a somewhat isolated part of the country's and local sport systems, a situation that generally stemmed from the fact that officially they cannot be operated or used by sport clubs. This isolation is emphasised in the case of *Orliks* located near schools and operated by their boards: they are less connected with the remaining sport infrastructure; they less often begin a cooperation of any kind with other *Orliks*; they are also less popular among users (except for children) because they are seen as 'secluded'. In other words, schools tend to absorb the *Orliks*. Those operated by Local Centres of Sport and Recreation (local government bodies responsible for the management of sport infrastructure) are usually much better integrated with the local sport systems; e.g. the Centre's managers try to keep the range of activities on offer complementary to that of the other facilities; additionally, the instructors can use the personal and the organisational resources of the Centre. Generally, the *Orliks* are better incorporated into the local sport systems in the communities with an already articulated sport policy (which in general is not common in Poland). The situation is more complicated in those communities which did not have specific plans concerning their further utilisation and were strongly disappointed with the maintenance costs that their budgets soon had to bear.

In practice, the managerial responsibilities fell on the *Orliks'* instructors. As mentioned above, in 2009 the programme of building the infrastructure was supplemented by a ministerial programme of financial support for sport instructors that were to be hired by the local communities. The localities that joined the programme could apply for co-financing of the instructors' salary, but in return they promised to keep the *Orlik* free of charge for 10 consecutive years. An instructor had to be a qualified coach, so usually the post is occupied by the PE teachers, particularly when the *Orlik* is located near a local school. He or she (less often since women represent less than 20% of instructors) has to work 160 hours per month for a salary amounting to 480 Euros. His or her tasks are defined by the local community, but usually they focus on the organisation of activities and tournaments. Often there are two instructors working at one *Orlik*, sharing the responsibilities and the salary between themselves. Sometimes the local community hires an additional person (out of the community's own financial resources) who takes care of the technical aspect of the complex, such as cleaning and maintenance. At the moment there are about 4000 instructors working in the programme, forming an entirely new profession in Poland.

The research consistently proved that an engaged sport instructor was the key to the optimal functioning of the complex. Most of them are well-educated (with university degrees, not only in PE, quite young and – in the times of the demographic collapse which causes emptying of schools and the decrease of positions for PE teachers – they care about their job and are ready to work additional hours

without additional pay. They claim that they like their job (77%) and work for the benefit of their local community (71%); only one out of five declared that they took the work because it was the only job available [FRKF 2014]. As mentioned above, the instructor has to be a professional coach (in at least one sport discipline). But soon it became apparent that *Orliks* were not just mere sport pitches – they resembled more a local centre of social life and required much more diversified and broader skills than those connected with training. Instructors were charged with a somewhat abstract task of developing sports for all, based on the inclusion of all social groups, especially amateurs who did not belong to a sport club. This required knowledge and soft skills in networking with other local institutions and organisations, looking for sponsors and volunteers; knowledge and skills they did not acquire in the course of their education (usually in PE Academies) or previous professional career. In the interviews (carried out during all the four parts of the research) they usually complained about being overworked (they work from 2.00 to 10.00 p.m. every day, weekends and holidays), poor working conditions and salary (they earn circa 480 Euros per month), the temporary character of their work, but above all – about the imprecise definition of their job. In order to ensure high attendance they take care of designing the sport package on offer in the complex, organising tournaments, searching for partners and sponsors, taking care of promotion and increasing the visibility of their activities, and at the same time, they have to be constantly physically active on the pitch to take care of the children playing there, to carry out activities, and to clean and repair the infrastructure. They often described themselves as a ‘one man band’ or ‘volunteers’.

In all these endeavours the instructors were largely left alone: there was no manual regarding how to manage the tasks, no description of the work methods or even of the way to maintain the pitches. In many cases there was no working contact between the managers and instructors of *Orlik* pitches that would result in knowledge and experience sharing; that did not take place in towns or districts, not to mention the wider network on a regional or central level. Out of necessity, there appeared contextual mechanisms of ‘learning through functioning’ – the instructors, although unprepared for the task and generally left without support, slowly evolved into multifunctional managers. Some of them managed the task better than others, and on a less *ad hoc* basis: usually those who had previous experience from abroad or from working in local sport centres. Their knowledge and a down-to-earth approach provided the *Orlik* infrastructural ‘hardware’ with the highly desired ‘software’ of soft skills and sport activities. Often they boldly experimented with new training routines, they used the multifunctional pitch for introducing new disciplines (e.g. playing tennis, although a pitch is not a tennis court), they tried to attract social groups that used to be excluded (or self-excluding) from physical activity, such as women and the elderly; they learned how to informally barter the booking of the pitch in the evening for groups of workers from a local corporation for new equipment bought by the latter for kids; how to

economise on the costly lighting and conservation of the surface. The overheads of the *Orlik* complexes naturally gave rise to new activities.

However, even in the most impressive cases, this managerial inventiveness was short-termed: over the four years of the research, the researchers encountered no case of a long-term or even annual strategy of the development of the *Orlik* complexes with set and specific goals (e.g. raising the number of women using the sport facilities). Due to the lack of a general network or a platform connecting the *Orliks* there was no chance for enhanced learning based on knowledge-sharing. Additionally, the make-do-and-mend resourceful mentality and the overwork consequently contributed to frustration and a professional burnout.

## 5. Networking the pitches

The 2010 period of research showed (and the 2013 period confirmed) that the potential of the programme was increasingly threatened by the lack of a holistic strategy for its management and development. The local governments already felt insecure about the future of the programme; the overworked, underpaid instructors had already felt demoralized; the very infrastructure of the pitches, particularly in less affluent communities which could not afford regular maintenance, was starting to deteriorate. The power of political mobilisation, which focused on the 'achievement' in the shape of a completed building programme, disappeared and there was no centrally-appointed new goal. In other words, when the novelty of the programme began to fade, a threat of imminent dissolution appeared. The continuation of the success of the programme started to depend on the effective utilisation of the infrastructure in place.

The impulse to introduce more innovative management of the *Orlik* pitches came from the outside. In 2009 the University of Warsaw initiated meetings of an informal initiative concerning sport volunteering during EURO 2012 and its legacy (Group Volunteering 2012+). For three consecutive years the meetings gathered the representatives of public institutions engaged in the preparation process and NGOs, which resulted in networking between actors and organisations who in the Polish context usually did not come into contact with each other, not to mention cooperation. It was particularly beneficial for the Ministry of Sport, as its representatives could get in touch with people trying to disseminate and practice the newest and most innovative methods of management in the area of social change, related not only to the field of sport. Even more importantly, ideas-sharing with the NGOs brought to their attention the immense social and sporting potential of the *Orlik* programme. This reverberated with the conclusions of the research on the functioning of the *Orlik* pitches, commissioned by the Ministry in 2009 and 2011. The most important outcome of the meeting – apart from the preparation of recommendations for the development of virtually non-existent sport volunteering in Poland – was working out the framework of the programme

dedicated to *Orlik* pitches and their future goals in the area of sport for all. The final shape of the programme was devised by the Foundation for the Development of Physical Culture, formally an NGO, but affiliated with the Ministry and financed from the public budget. The general aim of the Foundation concerned the development of the community sport through optimal management of the *Orlik* programme. It is worth mentioning that this may be recognised as one of the legacies of UEFA EURO 2012, as the board of the Foundation was in charge of social responsibility programmes during the event which made them aware of the new modes of managing of social change in the field of sport. Due to the experience gathered during the preparation process, the team knew how to make the context of organisational politics at the Ministry of Sport work, but they also recognised the importance of both evidence-based policy and of bottom-up, actor-centred, experience-grounded knowledge. Admittedly, the Foundation used the earlier evaluations of the programme to prove that its previous administrator, the School Sports Association – a traditional nationwide sports organisation – did not cope with the issues of management properly, and in 2014 took over the administration of the *Orlik* programme.

The Foundation focused on improving the soft skills and professional competences of the instructors; gathering the dispersed knowledge – especially good practices; and including the social groups often excluded from the sporting and social activities on offer on the pitch (older girls and women, the disabled, the elderly). The changes were introduced through three interlinked mechanisms: (1) constant monitoring of the situation on the *Orlik* pitches: permanent CATI with short questionnaires on basic issues carried out on 2300 instructors over nine months of their work in 2014, in addition, some of the most active instructors were asked to carry out a kind of grassroots expert monitoring of other pitches; (2) professional and soft-skills training courses for instructors, e.g. on the introduction of new sports (less popular disciplines fitted to the needs of the less active social groups, e.g. French boules for seniors) and, particularly, on management (collaboration with volunteers, obtaining financing from external sources, including less active social groups); (3) a website providing a framework for networking and gaining new management and professional knowledge. At the moment, each *Orlik* participating in the programme has its own webpage on the portal, which enables sharing of good practices (Nasz Orlik 2014). All those elements were intended to enhance the natural processes of ‘learning through functioning’.

## 6. The unexpected effects of the programme

From the theoretical perspective, the *Orliks* were an exogenous institutional design introduced in the already existing and often institutionally hardened context. Consequently, their introduction has had vast social reverberations. In most local communities, the *Orlik* was the first new public facility of any kind, built since

the end of the Communist rule. Unsurprisingly, the pitches successfully filled the gaping void of open, easily accessible, clean and aesthetic public space, especially in smaller towns and villages. In many localities they became 'the place to meet people', e.g. other parents bringing their kids to play; to organise a local even such as family picnics or religious festivities, or even a tourist attraction proudly presented to newcomers. All in all, it appears that the functions of the *Orlik* pitches are best characterised by the Ray Oldenburg concept of a 'third place' (1999). The 'first place' we live in is our house and a family and the 'second place', which usually consumes most of our time, is created by our workplace or a school. The 'third place' are all the other places that enable people to enter into unaffected and unforced social interactions. They are usually located near the living areas, user friendly, free of charge or low-cost, and open to everybody (thus, fostering social equality). The very existence of *Orliks* contributes to more frequent interactions: the sport activities and tournaments often engage whole families and spectators; the booking system of the pitches for use by amateur groups creates a situation of controlled conflict surrounding the public good and necessitated coordination and negotiation of interests between various social groups. Interviewed *Orlik* instructors claimed that the local communities quickly gained the sense of ownership of the pitches and that acts of vandalism are very rare. All in all, the general conclusion of the research is that the *Orliks* contributed to creating and enhancing a social capital (understood most basically as the willingness of a society/a social group to cooperate, based on the functioning of horizontal, non-hierarchical social ties between individuals, norms of diffused reciprocity and trust; Putnam 2000), a property much needed in the Polish society and characterised by an exceptionally low level of trust, as eight out of ten people in Poland agree with the statement 'You cannot trust others' (Sztompka 1999, CBOS 2012). Even though the design of the *Orlik* programme was initially quite inflexible and limited as far as its goals are concerned, the sheer introduction of a new institutions, together with the resourcefulness of its agents left to their own devices, was sufficient to invoke quite unexpected social changes. Based on evidence provided by the Foundation, we can prove that social type of impact appeared due to several years of programme appearance, yet we still have not got a strong evidence for the *Orliki* programme sustain impact on physical activity level within the Polish society (Wicker 2013).

## 7. Conclusion

The *Orlik* programme may be compared to other programmers of building small sport infrastructure carried out in other countries – for example in Finland since 1930 or in Germany after 1945 – but in this case the effort was much more time-concentrated: 2604 sport facilities were built over just five years. The analysis of the trajectory of the programme may contribute to a more general conclusion concerning the evolution of the modes of introducing political and social change.

Originally, the *Orlik* programme was tantamount to a kind of political decree; its major function was to fulfil the politically appointed goal of 'building 2012 pitches for EURO 2012' and to act as a visible sign of the government's determination to introduce reforms on a large scale. Its formula is inflexible, with roughly hewn assumptions and quite superficial goals embodied by a populist catchword: 'an *Orlik* in every local community'. It may be regarded as quite a typical example of a political undertaking in a country still trying to overcome the legacy of Communism with its centrally designed and managed political plans, carried out without any context sensitivity and without taking into account the empirical data or the opinions of the interested social actors. In the first stage, the management of the programme focused almost entirely on the process of building, overwhelmingly without reflection on its future functioning and wider impact. For a long time the strictly infrastructural programme was devoid of a long-term strategy for development and management. Nevertheless, the *Orliks* had to be operated somehow – and they did due to the engagement and resourcefulness of the instructors. However, the locally worked-out good practices remained local, because of the lack of a network between instructors or local governments enabling knowledge-sharing. Only recently these grassroots initiatives were given institutional support.

The *Orlik* programme provides a good lesson for the Polish public institutions. Its power lies in its simplicity: it was quite difficult to 'spoil' the programme whose major assumptions were simply to build new, easily accessible public spaces governed by clear rules and with clear functions. As of now, it seems that the Ministry of Sport understands that in relation to the *Orlik* programme its role should come down to governing, not ruling, to provide a general framework for the programme. The managerial function of the Ministry should take the shape of supporting the two-dimensional integration of the *Orlik* programme: internal (that is to say integration of the whole dispersed network of the *Orlik* pitches) and external (i.e. the integration of the *Orlik*/instructor programme with other sports programmes at the national, regional and local level, particularly weaving it into the general programme for the development of sport for all). The Ministry should also support and empower the instructors by equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary for the optimal performance of their functions. It should be subsidiary to the role of a local government which should, in turn, focus on networking and resource-pooling, integration of the *Orliks* into the local sports system, and on the improvement of the working conditions of the key factors in the socially beneficial functioning of the *Orliks* – the instructors.

Undoubtedly, the evolution of the *Orlik* programme has facilitated the learning process at the central level of the government concerning the utilisation of the sporting infrastructure. There is a wrong conviction in the Ministry of Sport that the sports system operates somewhat like a computer. The hardware in itself is a necessary, but insufficient condition; it must be supplemented by software; and the full benefit of them both is gained by a functioning network. This is also the case with sporting infrastructure (hardware) which must be supplemented by a careful

management design on the part of decision-making institutions, knowledge and soft skills on the part of operators and instructors, and all enhanced with a functioning network that enables the sharing of good practices and resource-pooling.

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