

ABSTRACT

Dissertation title: Polish Women's Climbing Activity in the Tatra Mountains, 1945–1989

This doctoral dissertation examines Polish women's climbing activity in the Tatra Mountains between 1945 and 1989 in the context of sporting, social, political, organizational, and cultural changes within the Polish mountaineering community. The study addresses a gap in historical scholarship, which has focused primarily on outstanding climbing achievements and men's activities, by offering a comprehensive analysis of women's participation in the development of Polish Tatra mountaineering.

The geographical scope of the dissertation encompasses the entire Tatra range, on both the Polish and the then Czechoslovak sides. The opening chronological boundary is 1945, marking the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the reconstruction of the Polish mountaineering community. The closing boundary is 1989, marking the end of the period of the Polish People's Republic and the beginning of fundamental political and economic transformations that changed the conditions in which climbing was practised. To explain the origins of post-war women's mountaineering, the study also considers the earlier history of women's presence in the Tatras, with particular attention to the development of independent climbing activity before 1945.

The main aim of the dissertation was to reconstruct and analyze the development of women's Tatra mountaineering between 1945 and 1989 and to identify the factors shaping the nature, scope, and dynamics of Polish women's climbing activity. Particular attention was devoted to changes in climbing standards, the emergence of independent all-women climbing teams, women's involvement in organizational and training activities, and evolving perceptions of female climbers within the mountaineering community. The study also examined women's motivations and the significance of Tatra mountaineering for their autonomy and social position.

The source material comprised archival records, documents of mountaineering organizations, climbers' route registers, records of completed ascents, mountain rescue documentation, press materials and publications produced by the climbing community, memoirs and biographical literature, iconographic sources, and accounts and interviews with members of the community under study. The research employed historical methods, including external and internal source criticism, direct and indirect establishment of historical facts, comparative and geographical methods, and content analysis. This approach made it possible

to combine a reconstruction of sporting activities with an examination of the social and cultural conditions affecting women's Tatra mountaineering.

The findings indicate that Polish women's Tatra mountaineering underwent substantial changes during the period examined. The immediate post-war years were characterized by the rebuilding of the climbing community, the continuation of pre-war traditions, and women's participation in mixed-gender climbing teams. From the 1950s onward, the development of training, improvements in climbing techniques, and the growing emphasis on sporting achievements were accompanied by a gradual increase in women's independence. During the 1960s and 1970s, women increasingly undertook technically demanding routes, formed independent all-women teams, and participated in the growing professionalization of Tatra mountaineering as a sport. In the 1980s, despite political and economic constraints, they continued to climb demanding routes and took part in technical and cultural changes associated with the emergence of new forms of climbing.

The analysis also revealed a gradual change in women's position within the Tatra mountaineering community. Their skills, experience, and climbing achievements gained increasing recognition, although stereotypical assumptions about gender roles were not entirely eliminated. The development of women's autonomy was a varied, multifactorial process, resulting both from individual climbers' initiatives and from broader changes within the climbing community.

The conclusions confirm that between 1945 and 1989 Polish women's Tatra mountaineering evolved towards greater independence, sporting specialization, and agency. These changes were shaped by the interaction of political, economic, sociocultural, organizational, technical, and generational factors. Women not only participated in the development of Polish Tatra mountaineering but also helped shape its culture, sporting standards, and organizational practices. Their activities formed an integral part of the history of Polish Tatra mountaineering and alpinism in the second half of the twentieth century. The Tatras provided a setting in which women acquired climbing skills, pursued sporting ambitions, and gradually challenged social perceptions of women's abilities and roles in high-mountain activities.

Keywords: women's Tatra mountaineering, history of mountaineering, women in sport, high-altitude climbing, Tatra Mountains, Polish People's Republic, history of physical culture.