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## Nordic Walking instructor training in Great Britain and Poland - Case studies

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**Abstract:** This paper presents education systems of Nordic Walking instructors in Poland and the Great Britain. These countries have different levels of socio-economic development however in both the percentage of Nordic walkers has significantly increased since the activity became a very popular form of maintaining physical condition, especially among the elderly.

**Key words:** Nordic Walking, instructor, active leisure, physical recreation

### Nordic Walking as a form of active leisure

The origins of Nordic Walking date back to the 1930s Finland when in summer time the Finnish cross-country skiers used ski poles in the training to prepare for winter seasons (Chomka 2008: 272). In 1960s, Leena Jääskeläinen introduced walking with poles to schools as new ideas for P.E. in schools (INWA 2010). In 1987, the first walking with poles event Finlandia kävely (Finlandia Walk) took place in Tampere (INWA 2010). In mid 1990s Finnish ski equipment company Exel, the Finnish Institute of Sport in Vierumäki and the Finnish Central Association for Recreational Sports and Activities (Suomen Latu) reinvented walking with poles activity and promoted it to the Finnish general public (Sandberg 2005). The positive effect of walking with poles was also noticed in the USA. In 1985, Tom Rutlin (Urbanski 01.11.2007), started 'Exerstriding' – a Power Walk training method which used walking poles to simultaneously exercise all the body's major muscles while walking, running, skipping or bounding (Rutlin 15.04.2013). Initially, the cross-country ski poles were used, however they were too long and uncomfortable for walking so after many attempts they were replaced with specially designed poles (Nalazek 2008: 186). The name of activity "Nordic Walking" was introduced and registered as a new sport in 1997 in Finland. Three

years later, in 2000, International Nordic Walking Association (INWA) was established to promote the activity internationally, develop Nordic Walking training and support a global network for Nordic Walking instructors in over 40 countries. Nordic walking is an attractive activity because it is easy to learn and can be performed throughout the year (Zurawik 2013). It can be practiced at three levels of advancement: health that promotes loss of body weight, fitness that improves endurance and strength, and sport which consists of running and jumping to improve the fitness and muscular endurance (Piech, Raczynska 2010; Karawan 1992; Morgulec-Adamowicz, Marszałek et al. 2011; Kocur, Deskur-Śmielecka et al. 2009). The activity is recommended for various populations with different health problems as it engages around 90% of body muscles and apart from strengthening lower body it also improves the upper body musculature and performance such as mobility of neck and shoulders (Piech, Raczynska 2010; Kukkonen-Harjula, Hiilloskorpi et al. 2007). Due to its attractiveness as a active leisure activity and health benefits, Nordic Walking is getting more popular around the world (Šokelienė, Česnaitienė 2011; Morgulec-Adamowicz, Marszałek et al. 2011; Church, Earnest et al. 2002; Hansen, Smith 2009; Antosiewicz 2010). Nordic Walking is considered one of the fastest growing forms of recreation around the world especially among middle-aged and elderly (Kukkonen-Harjula, Hiilloskorpi et al. 2007). It is estimated that this form of physical activity attracted over 10 million Europeans in 2012 (INWA 2013). The sport is spreading to big countries like the USA and China, so the amount of walkers is expected to rise dramatically in the coming years (Suomen Latu 2013). The phenomenon of Nordic walking lies in its simplicity. As a form of recreation it is relatively inexpensive, does not require a large amount of effort, equipment and organization to see the beneficial results just after a few weeks of physical activity (Figurscy 2008: 59). Nordic walking combines elements of cross-country skiing and walking, which is the essential form of human physical activity. Moreover, the individually regulated pace and dynamic movements have many positive effects physical and psychological health. Nordic walking increases exercise intensity of walking due to active use of poles (Breyer, Breyer-Kohansal et al. 2010), without increasing perceived exertion (Church, Earnest et al. 2002). The activity is also evident to increase rate of energy consumption by 18% - 22% compared to normal walking due to increased use of the upper body due to greater shoulder movement (Figard-Fabre, Fabre et al. 2010; Church, Earnest et al. 2002; Karawan 1992; Bielec, Poltorak, Warchol 2011:156) and additional weights of poles (Hagen, Hennig et al. 2011). Furthermore, Nordic walking increase oxygen consumption by 11% -23% (Church, Earnest et al. 2002; Porcari, Hendrickson et al. 1997; Larkin 1992) and heart rate levels between 6% -16%

(Church, Earnest et al. 2002; Porcari, Hendrickson et al. 1997; Schiffer, Knicker et al. 2006) due to outdoor conditions. The activity also improves moods, reduces depression symptoms, anger, fatigue and increase vitality and well-being (Larkin 1992). In addition, Arem (2008: 19-22) also mentioned reduction of a heart rate at rest so walkers are able to march and travel long distances in shorter time, increase in the release of endorphins, strengthening muscles, decrease in cholesterol levels and relief from shoulder pains. Walking with poles have beneficial effect on people with various medical problems, such as: obesity (Church, Earnest et al. 2002; Šokelienė, Česnaitienė 2011), people after acute coronary syndrome (Kocur, Deskur-Śmielecka et al. 2009), patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (Breyer, Breyer-Kohansal et al. 2010), patients suffering from depression (Larkin 1992; Breyer, Breyer-Kohansal et al. 2010), people suffering from back pain (Hartvigsen, Morso et al. 2010), female breast cancer survivors (Sprod, Drum et al. 2005) or patients suffering from Parkinson's disease (Tschentscher, Niederseer et al. 2013). Nordic walking also raises confidence in walking on uneven, sometimes slippery surfaces (Sadowski 2008:25). Therefore, Nordic Walking can be perceived as one of the lifestyle activities which are able to prevent civilization diseases related to reduction in physical activity such as coronary heart disease, obesity, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure, anxiety and stress (Tolley 2003:688; Kepa, Szachta, 2011: 34).

### **Outdoor Activity Instructor, Recreational Coach, Nordic Walking Instructor**

Recreational activities have been known to humans forever, as there have been always people who spurred and empowered others to be physical active (Siwiński 2005: 355). In the Great Britain, outdoor leisure instructors gain instructor qualifications when obtaining Coaching Certificate – UKCC (levels 1-4) in sport courses offered by universities and colleges around the country (Sports Coach UK 2013). Currently there are over 30 sport disciplines approved by the UKCC. Levels 1-3 are awarded Certificate in Coaching Support Guide. The basic level 1, includes theoretical knowledge and some practical experience in the field. Passing level 1 leads to level 2, which involves sports training. After completing level 2, level 3 requires extended knowledge and skills in particular sport discipline. After completing level 3, the highest level of training requires extensive theoretical knowledge and practical experience in sport discipline. Finishing training at the level 4 is awarded UK Coaching Certificate (Sports Coach UK 2013).

Table 1. List of outdoor leisure instructors in Great Britain and Poland.

<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>Poland</b>
Angling, Archery, Athletics, Badminton, Baseball softball, Basketball, Wheelchair basketball, Boccia, Bowls, Amateur Boxing, Canoeing, Cricket, Cycling, Equestrian, (EMDP) Exercise Movement Dance, Fencing, Football, Goalball, Golf, PGA, Gymnastics, Handball, Hockey, Judo, Lacrosse, Pentathlon, Mountaineering, Netball, Orienteering, Rounders, Rowing, Yachting, Rugby, Wheelchair Rugby, Shooting, Squash, Snow Sports, Racketball, Swimming, Table Tennis, Teakwondo, Lawn Tennis, Triathlon, Volleyball, Water Ski, Wakeboard, Weightlifting, Wrestling,	Aerobic, Badminton, Billiard, Fitness-gymnastics, Fitness - strength training, Fitness - psychophysical training, Fitness - jogging, Golf, Leisure games, Equestrian, Hippo therapy, Canoeing, Kinezygerontoprofilaktyka, Cycling, Korfball, Basketball, Hang gliding, Archery, Model airplane, Downhill skiing, Cross-country skiing, Paintball, Scuba diving, Swimming, Football, Volleyball, Snowboard, Elf-defense, Powerboating, Survival, Tennis, Table tennis, Windsurfing, Roller skating, Rock climbing, Yachting,

In Poland, a person becomes an outdoor activity instructor after obtaining a diploma in physical education or tourism and recreation studies with a specialization in training, which includes at least 80 hours in a given sport discipline, either has at least a high school diploma, completed a specialized instructor course in a chosen sport discipline and passed the final exam. The instructor courses are conducted by universities and teacher training colleges, which offer courses in education - physical education, physical therapy or tourism and recreation. Instructor training classes are divided into spot instructor, disability sport instructor, wellness instructor, active leisure instructor. Furthermore, there are three levels of coaching: the second-class coach, first-class coach, championship class trainer. It must be noted that both countries do not recognize Nordic walking coaches or instructors. Furthermore, Poland in contrast to the UK has a clearer separation of instructors in the disability sport and recreation, which includes the following disciplines: badminton, biathlon, billiard, boccia, Goalball, team games (volleyball, sitting volleyball, wheelchair rugby, wheelchair basketball, basketball, football), equestrian, judo, cycling, canoeing, bowls, athletics, archery, speed skating, figure skating, cross country skiing, downhill skiing, swimming, weightlifting, shooting, chess, wheelchair fencing, wheelchair dancing, table tennis, tennis, wheelchair tennis, rowing, yachting. This distinction is a result of different methodological foundations in these countries, which separate able-bodied sport and recreation from disabled. In Great Britain, the permit to work with disabled people is obtained during the instructor training course, while in Poland the separate instructor training and qualifications are needed to work with disabled people.

## **Nordic Walking Instructor as an animator**

Nordic Walking is an easy to learn activity however the benefits and desired effect of the activity may be achieved by following the exercise precisely, especially in the initial stages of learning walking with poles technique. Therefore, the instructor knowledge and skills are vital. Mastering the basic Nordic walking technique and acquiring theoretical knowledge will benefit practicing the sport by bringing a lot of satisfaction and excellent results as well as improvements in health and well-being. The role of Nordic Walking instructor should not only involve giving the exercise instructions during the various phases of training. Nordic Walking instructors due to possession of professional skills should be recognized as recreation animators, sport promoters as well as organizers of this sport. Thus, when comparing Nordic Walking instructors to recreation animators, the same social roles must be assigned, such as a promoter, leader and organizer. Promoter - is an idea man, in which one firmly believes. Promoters have a broad scientific and social knowledge in the sport and leisure field to promote the idea to the local communities to improve their status. Leader – is an informal conductor in the group. Leaders have dominance in the knowledge and action in the field of leisure and sport. Leaders aspire to change public awareness of physical activity and active leisure and implement active lifestyle habits in the local communities. Organizer - is a person who organizes groups of people who spend their free time in a socially acceptable, organized activities and events. Organizers arrange meetings with the authorities to promote leisure activities and facilities, as well as the positive idea of physical activity in local communities. Leisure organizers and participants are partners who help and inspire each other (Toque-Werner 2005). These characteristics distinguish professional instructors and affect directly the development of a Nordic walking phenomenon in contemporary societies. All trained instructors apart from training others, participating in organized events, winning awards and medals face challenges of organizing their own events that can demonstrate the gained qualifications, skills and above all, their extensive experience in the sport.

## **The Nordic Walking instructor training in Great Britain**

In the UK, only two organizations provide professional NW instructor training- Nordic Walking UK (NWUK) and British Nordic Walking, which is a part of International Nordic Walking Federation (INWA).

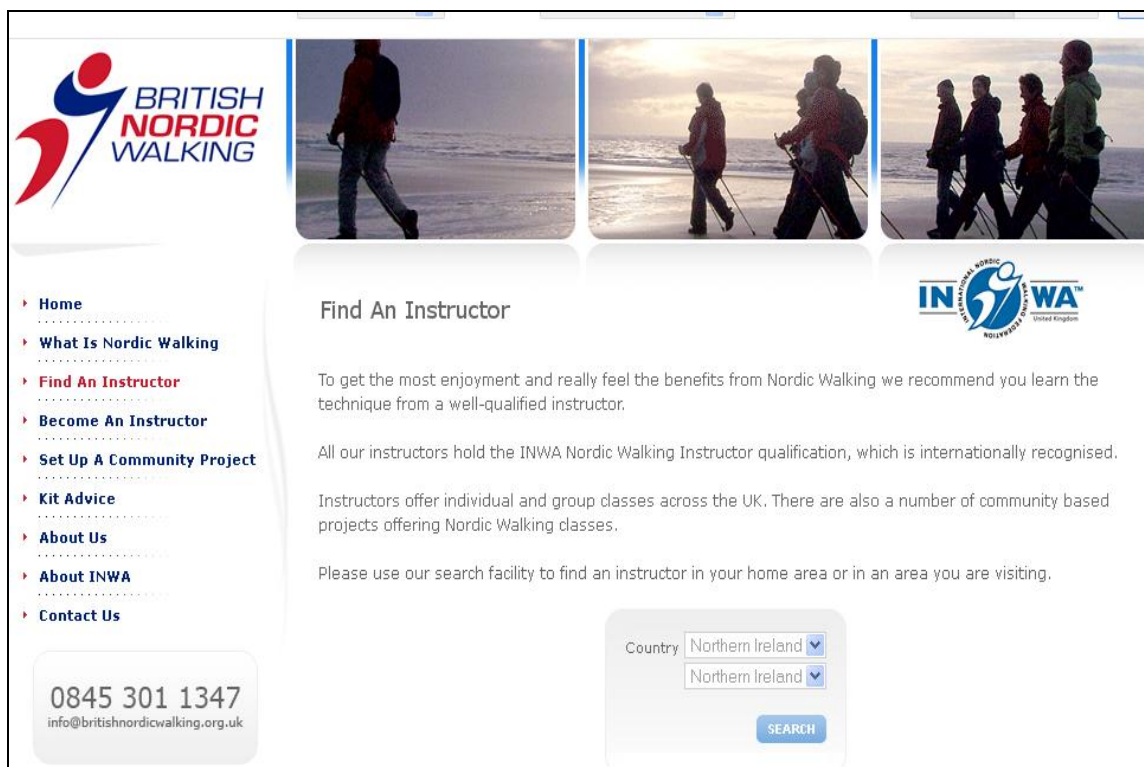
Nordic Walking UK trains individuals from any backgrounds to be certified Nordic walking instructors or leaders and gain level 2 fitness qualifications leading to entry on the Register of Exercise Professionals. Nordic Walking UK awards three types of qualifications:

NWUK Nordic walking Fitness Instructor, Central YMCA Qualifications (CYQ) level 2 Certificate in Fitness Walking (including NWUK Nordic walking Fitness Instructor), NWUK Nordic Walk Leader and NWUK Nordic walking Community Instructor (Nordic walking UK 2013). NWUK Nordic walking Fitness Instructor course is eligible for qualified fitness instructors with minimum level 2 qualification in gym-based, studio-based or water-based fitness. The course is endorsed by SkillsActive and worth 16 CPD credits on the Register of Exercise Professionals. The course lasts 2 days. It includes practical teaching, planning and instructing NW classes and final assignment. Furthermore, it offers modules such as Ultimate NW circuits, Weight loss walking, young explorers' junior programme and Nordic SkiFit. CYQ level 2 certificate in fitness walking, including NWUK Nordic walking Fitness Instructor is for non-fitness qualified people. The course consists of theoretical part: level 2 mandatory online learning ,which includes anatomy, physiology, health safety and welfare, principles of exercise, fitness and health, know how to support your clients. The practical part lasts 2 days and includes practical teaching, planning and instructing NW classes and final assignment. NWUK Nordic walking Community Instructor certificate is for people who want to assist a certified NWUK Nordic walking instructors. The course lasts a day and provides a basic understanding of technique and route planning, safety, leadership skills. All applicants must be recommended by a certified NWUK Nordic walking instructor delivering the NWUK "Learn to Nordic walk" programme. NWUK Nordic Walk Leader qualifications are for people who want to lead NW classes for community projects, but do not want to gain a fitness qualification. NW leader can lead walks for health screened and taught by a qualified fitness instructor people. The course lasts 6 hours and involves practical leading methods. However, the course does not advise on technique or intensity levels. Nordic Walking UK trained more than 2500 NW instructors, which are registered online (Nordic walking UK 2013). All NWUK instructors are listed on the organization website and may be contacted via phone or email.



Picture 1. Logo of accredited NWUK instructors (<http://nordicwalking.co.uk>)

British Nordic Walking is the only training body in the Great Britain accredited by INWA (International Nordic Walking Federation) which has more than 700 INWA qualified Nordic Walking instructors in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales (British Nordic walking 2013). British Nordic walking organizes INWA NW Instructor and INWA NW Leader course. INWA certified NW instructor course lasts two days (12 hours). Preferably, applicants must have an experience in Nordic walking. If not, INWA encourages arranging the lessons before joining the instructor course. Furthermore, applicants should have fitness instructor qualifications, teaching or medical background or be a walk leader. The course covers topics such as: NW history and benefits, INWA 10 Step Teaching Method, three levels of NW advancement- health, fitness and sport, health and fitness methods in safe environments and organization of classes and events in the local community. Second day consists of a two-part assessment: written and practical. If the assessment is unsuccessful, participants may retake the exam up to three months after the course, free of charge. After the course, participants are awarded INWA Nordic walking Instructor Certificate and can teach provided they have suitable equipment and can satisfy all health and safety conditions. INWA certified Nordic walking Leader course lasts one day and is suitable for anyone who want to lead walks for people who already been taught to Nordic walk by a qualified instructor. The applicant must be a competent Nordic walkers supervised by a local INWA instructor. The course involves learning to plan group Nordic walks in safe environment, lead safe warm-up and cool-down and motivate a group of Nordic walkers. All INWA NW instructors are registered on INWA website (British Nordic walking 2013).



Picture 2. Accredited INWA NW instructors search engine website (<http://www.britishnordicwalking.org.uk>)

## The Nordic Walking instructor training system in Poland

Number of organizations, foundations, associations and societies in Poland award various certifications in Nordic Walking, such as Nordic walking Instructor, Nordic walking Guide, Nordic walking Judge, Nordic walking Trainer and Nordic walking Animator after meeting certain requirements.

Polish Nordic walking organizations include: LEKI Nordic Walking School, Polish Federation of Nordic Walking, Polish School of Nordic Walking & Wellness and Polish Association of Nordic Walking. The full list of Nordic walking organisations and its certifications is presented in table 2.

Table 2. Nordic walking instructors in selected organizations in Poland.

	Organisation	Established	Instructors	Type of certification
1.	LEKI NordicWalking School	2005	635	Leki Active Leader Leki Instructor
2.	Polish Federation of Nordic Walking	2007	1109	NW Guide NW Instructor NW Judge NW Trainer

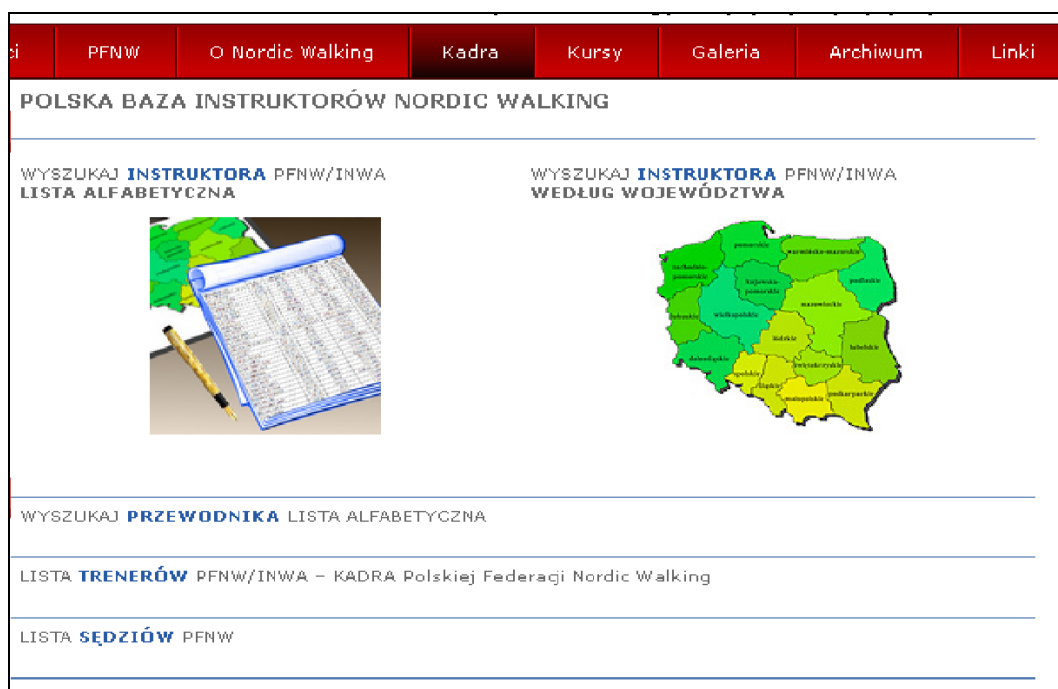


3.	Polish School of Nordic Walking & Wellness	2008	400	Assistant Instructor Consultant Instructor Specialist Instructor
4.	Polish Association of Nordic Walking	2010	257	NW Guide NW Instructor NW Judge NW Animator of recreation

LEKI Nordic Walking School awards a LEKI NW Instructor certificate. The applicants must have an experience in teaching, which is documented by working in educational, health, rehabilitation, fitness, sports club or tourist facilities. Furthermore, either college or university diploma in sport, tourism, medical or related studies or a sport instructor certificate is needed. The course lasts two days (12-13 hrs). The first day of training involves a theoretical lectures in history, health aspects of walking with poles, scenario training, NW equipment and accessories. Practical part consists of warm-up exercises, teaching proper technique and workouts with the advice how to correct errors at basic, advanced, sport levels. The second day of training involves elements of intensive training, i.e. running with poles, walking up and down the slope, other intensive forms of walking, strength and stretching training techniques of walking with poles. Nordic walkers trained by future instructors may apply for an Active Leader Certificate (Leki Nordic walking 2013).

The Polish Federation of Nordic Walking awards a Nordic walking instructor degree, which is equivalent to INWA instructor certificate. The applicants must obtain at least a high school education, instructor or trainer certifications in sport or physical recreation. It is not applicable to graduates and students of the Academies of Physical Education, Schools of Physical Education and Medical Universities graduates of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation courses. Furthermore, the applicants must have an experience in organizing and leading sport and physical recreation courses. The course consists of 12 hours of practical training and 5 hours of theoretical lectures. The theoretical part of the course includes history, objectives and values of NW training, NW equipment, selected theoretical and methodological issues of health training, basics of organizing outdoor sports and recreation events for different age groups. The practical part focuses on basic NW techniques at health, fitness and sport levels, rules of selection adequate poles and technique improvement. The classes consist of warm-up, strength, coordination and stretching exercises, outdoor games with poles, using audio-visual techniques in training and basics of organization and active participation in recreational sports events. To obtain the NW Instructor certification, participants must finish the course and pass the final exam. The certificate entitles NW instructors to conduct Nordic walking classes or

self-training. The recognition of qualifications awarded by other Nordic walking organisations is awarded after presenting skills in Nordic walking techniques and overall physical fitness during the events organized by the Polish Federation of Nordic Walking (PFNW 2013).



Picture 3. Accredited INWA NW instructors search engine website (<http://www.pfnw.eu>)

Polish School of Nordic Walking & Wellness award certificates in three categories: NW Assistant Instructor, NW Consultant Instructor and NW Specialist Instructor. All trainings consist of 17 hours and provide the opportunity to join the Nature Fitness Academy. Anyone who wants to improve Nordic Walking and acquire teaching skills in basics of Nordic Walking technique may become NW Assistant Instructor. NW Consultant Instructor may become a person who has a professional education, wants to enhance their professional skills, improve technique and methodology of teaching Nordic Walking. NW Specialist Instructor may become a person with professional experience who wants to improve skills and health training. The NW Specialist Instructor course consists of two parts: planning the training process and the basics of nutrition and supplementation. The course allows conducting certified trainings at a basic level. Instructors trained by other NW organisations who wish to enter the Polish School of Nordic Walking & Wellness must take part in the complementary course, which focuses on improving NW techniques based on the standards adopted by the organization (Nordic walk 2013).

Polish Nordic Walking Association awards Nordic Walking Instructor certificate, when applicants have one of the following: a certificate of working in an educational, health,

rehabilitation, fitness, sports or tourist club or run own sport or recreational; diploma in sport, tourism, medical or related studies or completed sport, fitness, rehabilitation instructor course. The course lasts 8 hours and includes Nordic Walking history, health benefits of the activity, use of NW in recreation, rehabilitation and sport, levels of NW advancement and technique, methods to control the intensity of effort, safety during training, methodology of NW techniques, training and exercises for children and youth (PSNW 2013).

### **Nordic Walking Instructor on-line course - a paradox**

Nordic Nordic Walking has become so popular in Poland that some organisations train Nordic Walking instructors against all methodological principles, for example a specialized course for NW instructors that is conducted online on an e-learning platform. All applicants must be over 18, have a secondary education and do not have any medical conditions that may prevent working as a Nordic Walking instructor. This online course awards NW Guide and NW Instructor certificates. It consists of 4 lessons and mastering each of them takes around 10 hours, in total 40 hours. Participants who already have knowledge and skills in Nordic walking are able to complete the course in one day.

The course consists of following parts:

- Logging in to the e-learning platform with instant access to all teaching materials after paying the course fees
- Participation in the course by using the materials available on the platform, such as PDF files, presentations , attachments, materials for download)
- Passing tests
- Filling in the contact form as the student is automatically registered as a Nordic Walking instructor
- Receiving a card and a certificate by post

All course participants must record and upload to e-learning platform the presentation film on one of the online topics in the Nordic walking field. The aim of the presentation is to evaluate participants' knowledge of Nordic walking. Furthermore, participants must pass the final exam in general knowledge of Nordic walking. The exam consists of 20 questions randomly selected from all the previous online course tests. Participants pass the final exam when they answer correctly to 15 out of 20 questions. Participants who completed an online course receive Nordic Walking Instructor certificate and they are registered as a professional NW instructors. The certificate is issued for life and does not require additional upgrades (Instruktor Nordic walking 2013).

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## **Conclusion**

Nordic Nordic Walking is a relatively young form of recreation however extended body of research has already brought attention to its benefits on human body. Growing popularity of walking with poles in modern society is associated with the availability and simplicity of the activity, which is based on natural and primary human behaviour (Zurawik 2014). These characteristics reduce physiological or economic barriers to Nordic walking, unlike the other forms of recreation. The only constrains in participation in Nordic walking are mental conditions which may result in physical refrain from practicing Nordic walking and discouragement to any physical activity. Especially, the elderly do not take up new activities as they may afraid of negative reactions from their friends and family. Therefore, NW instructors must have broad theoretical and practical knowledge, which is provided by a suitable methodology during the instructor courses, to motivate others to actively participate in physical activity, explain and advise participants on the role of active leisure in personal development and socialising for balanced and meaningful life (Heintzman 2009). Furthermore, instructors should poses communication skills to integrate with groups, which can allow participants' openness, expression of needs and overcoming barriers (Zaremba, 2005: 407). The analysis of NW instructor training systems in Poland and Great Britain demonstrated utilization of similar training methods. Although, it also showed the differences in training courses due to diverse domestic educational systems.

Having compared the methodological contents of NW instructor courses in both countries, it was noticed that the organizations involved in NW instructor trainings draw on the experience of Finnish Nordic Walking precursors by creating similar educational framework, adopting standards, training methods and practice. However, the main unsettling inconvenience in the system is lack of recognition of NW instructor certifications between national organizations in both countries. Considering Nordic Walking popularity and similar training methodology, Nordic walking organizations should cooperate in awarding and recognition of Nordic walking qualifications nationally and internationally, like in case of other leisure activities i.e.: fitness, bodybuilding etc. The most evident difference in Nordic Walking instructor training system in Poland and Great Britain is a large variation in number of organizations that specialise in awarding the certificates. In Great Britain, NW instructor trainings are

conducted by two organizations. In Poland several organizations and associations have different selection criteria for future NW instructors, various methods and classes of qualifications. The differences in certifications between organisations may cause mistrust for existing and future NW instructors as well as irreversible loss to the activity which is at the early stages of development.

Thus, to resolve these problems in both countries it is necessary to:

- adopt constant standards and frameworks for NW instructor training,
- introduce the official recognition of NW qualifications, which is accepted by all organizations and between countries,
- create a platform for exchanging experiences between NW instructors and organizations,
- introduce Nordic Walking to the register of exercise professionals, recognized by the governing bodies,
- organize sport, recreational that integrate representatives of various communities.

All these mentioned actions should be undertaken as soon as possible, so there would not be rivalry and scepticism between members of various Nordic walking organisations and associations, which negatively influence the expansion of activity in those countries.

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