

# Canoeing for persons with disabilities in Poland

from a leisure activity  
to a high performance sport



# Idea

History of canoeing for persons with disabilities in Poland is closely connected with the Sports Rehabilitation Association START in Poznan with the roots in the early '60s

The idea of using sports activity in the rehabilitation appeared in the Orthopedic Clinic at the Poznan University of Medical Science led by **Professor Wiktor Dega**. It happened almost concurrently with ideas of **Professor Ludwig Guttmann** at Stoke Mandeville Hospital.



# Programme

START finally created a programme with the slogan "**Work - Sport - Rehabilitation**" promoting sport among the workers with disabilities from few Poznan cooperatives.

Guess what sports were first used in the program?



# Sports first used in the programme

Swimming and canoeing!

## Why canoeing?

About 60 years ago when there were fewer forms of entertainment than today (no television, no Internet) and the Poles could only dream of going abroad, canoeing as a type of active tourism was very popular.

All cooperative workers and their families could rest and play sport absolutely for free.





# Canoeing for whom?

At the beginning canoeing was addressed to people with lower limb dysfunctions and slightly later to people with upper limb dysfunctions



## Canoeing also for

After some time, it was possible to propose canoeing to wheelchair users – persons with spinal cord injuries and even Cerebral Palsy



# How long and where ?

Initially, only 1 or 2 days canoe trips were organised in our region, then in other ones. For more advanced users canoeing on mountain rivers in the south of Poland began to be organised.





# New idea of 2/3 weeks rehabilitation camps

A real revolution came with a new START idea of 2/3 weeks rehabilitation camps. Summer camps program included first of all canoeing and winter camps focused on the alpine skiing





# Inventor and promotor of camps :

Edward NIEMCZYK : “Camps made each person with disability feel free in a canoe or on skis, gave an opportunity to meet new friends, put value in their lives, overcome their own weaknesses and fears. Camps became their second better world”.



# Today

Today camps based on START patterns are regularly organised by many organisations throughout Poland. For 30 years of market economy we operate in completely different conditions and surroundings than before.

Programs based on old proven patterns and new solutions are addressed to adult, youth and children.



























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# Active rehabilitation camps H2O + Adrenaline

We use a lot of experience introduced in Sweden by the Rekryteringsgruppen for Aktive Rehabilitering. It is a comprehensive program of social and professional activation of wheelchair users with spinal cord injuries. The Swedish program was transferred to Poland 30 years ago and now Polish Active Rehabilitation is a large and important social movement with thousands of people with disabilities living better and with brighter perspectives. **The camps of Active rehabilitation were enriched by START with H2O+Adrenaline water activities programme**





# H<sup>2</sup> + ADRENALINA



Obozy „Startu” Poznań z programem sportów wodnych dla osób z niepełnosprawnością.  
Sports summer camps for people with disabilities of „START” Assoc. Poznan, Poland.



# From a leisure activity to a high performance sport

9 years ago, thanks to the inspiration of Diego Doga , we started organizing the paracanoe sport in the country

Paracanoeing evolved from a leisure activity to a high performance sport

The dream of Professor Guttmann and Professor Doga and Edward Niemczyk has come true...



# Polska reprezentacja parakajakarstwa 2012





# Conclusions resulting from the 60 years of adapted canoeing in Poland

## Values of paracanoeing :

- a huge contribution to all dimensions of health, including mental and social one
- highly inclusive and very adequate for many social groups
- useful and helpful in fight against discrimination and exclusion.



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