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Witold WARCHOLIK\*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3413-582X>

Dorota CHMIELOWSKA\*\*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7332-3359>

## Profile of a Participant in Mantrailing in Poland

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### Sylwetka uczestnika rekreacji mantrailingowej w Polsce

#### Streszczenie

Celem pracy było określenie profilu osoby uprawiającej tropienie użytkowe (mantrailing) na terenie Polski. Badaniem objęto osoby zainteresowane rekreacją mantrailingową – członków grupy Mantrailing Polska. Zastosowano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego z wykorzystaniem techniki badawczej kwestionariusza ankiety, opracowanego przez autorów artykułu. Osoby zainteresowane mantrailingiem są grupą relatywnie młodą i dobrze wykształconą, w zdecydowanej większości zamieszkującą ośrodki miejskie. Podobnie jak w większości aktywności związanych z psami, liczebnie przeważają w niej kobiety. Podstawowymi motywami uprawiania mantrailingu w Polsce jest określenie potrzeb i predyspozycji psa oraz chęć obserwacji jego aktywności bezpośrednio w warunkach pracy w terenie. Dla amatorów tropienia użytkowego zdawanie egzaminów i uzyskiwanie certyfikatów w tym zakresie nie jest istotne, podobnie jak aspekt rywalizacji między ich psami. Listę ras psów mantrailingowych cechuje ogromna różnorodność. W większości opinii brak też zdecydowanych wskazań ras preferowanych w tropieniu użytkowym. Głównymi inhibitorami mantrailingu w Polsce są ograniczenia czasowe i czynnik finansowy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** mantrailing, rekreacja, aktywność fizyczna, sporty kynologiczne.

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\* PhD, Pedagogical University of Krakow, the Institute of Geography, the Department of Tourism and Regional Studies, e-mail: warwitek@gmail.com

\*\* PhD, Pedagogical University of Krakow, the Institute of Geography, the Department of Tourism and Regional Studies, e-mail: dorota.chmielowska@up.krakow.pl

## Abstract

The aim of the study was to determine the profile of people practising mantrailing on the territory of Poland. The study covered people who practice or have practiced mantrailing – members of the group „Mantrailing Poland”. The scientific method applied was a diagnostic survey – a questionnaire consisting of questions designed by the authors. People interested in mantrailing in Poland are a relatively young and well-educated group, the vast majority come from the city. In the case of tracking, the predominance of women in dog-related activities is also confirmed. The main motives for practising tracking in Poland are determining the needs, predispositions and activity of the dog and the desire to learn about its performance directly in the field. It is not, however, about passing exams and obtaining certificates in tracking, or the aspect of competition. The list of breeds with which people practise mantrailing is extremely varied with no strict list of breeds that they consider preferable for this form of recreation. The main inhibitors of tracking in Poland are financial resources and lack of time.

**Keywords:** mantrailing, recreation, physical activity, dog sports.

## Introduction

Dogs use their nose at all times: when strolling they sniff out greenery, look for hidden treats, like to play „lost” owner or toy, and eagerly follow scent trails left by other dogs, animals and people. This dog’s gift - olfaction - has been widely used for a very long time (rescue, hunting, guarding) and also, recently, in recreation and cynological sports. Creative tracking is the ability to independently adjust the style of a dog to changing environmental conditions. Nowadays, the properties of scents, the rules of their spreading and the possibilities to identify and distinguish in between them are studied using the most modern methods and equipment. This is not a strict delimitation, not only because of differences in the definition of „tracking” among authors, but because of the intermingling of professional or sporting/recreational forms of dog/human cooperation: a) tracking (sport tracking), b) mantracking (in Poland = sportive tracking), c) blood trailing (hunting), d) searching, e) nosework, brainwork and f) mantrailing.

Mantrailing takes place in two or three stages:

- a trampler walks along a chosen, suitably prepared route, building a trail, i.e. they „accidentally” lose objects soaked with their scent. The path covered usually runs through varied terrain and has a certain number of bends, splits, etc.
- a tracking tandem sets off after a certain time (e.g. 1–2 hours). The dog and the handler search for the trampler or the trampler and the objects they left behind. The handler may also hear the story of the „missing” person that the dog should find. The tandem moves by walking, marching or running fast, as the pace is always imposed by the dog. The handler tries not to interfere and intervenes only as a last resort, which requires a good knowledge of the dog,

— the tracking tandem may be followed by a group of observers/judges, who must not be too close to the working animal in order not to distract it.

The aim of the study was to determine the profile of people practising mantrailing on the territory of Poland. Mantrailing is a relatively new form of recreation and as such, it lacks substantial characterization in the literature, especially in the context of its participants. This paper aims to verify the characteristics of a mantrailer, based on observation and surveys among dog owners. The hypothetical mantrailer seems to be a young, well-educated person in good health and of material standing, residing in an urban area, motivated to pursue mantrailing as a form of recreation and outdoor observation of their dog's traits and abilities.

In the colloquial language, there is a term for sport based on the use of animals, but sport is exercise and games aiming at developing physical aptitude and its manifestation. These games and exercise are performed according to established regulations, are often accompanied with competition and participants striving to achieve the best results. None of the popular definitions and concepts of sport (ludic, agonistic, pedagogical) takes into account sports practiced together with animals or by animals themselves [32]. Mantrailing is a form of physical recreation. For the purposes of this study, we have adopted a definition of recreation as a set of behaviours that are undertaken outside of professional, family and social duties. The latter serve recreation, entertainment and psycho-physical development. Recreation is a broader concept than tourism, which can be one of its motoric, social, economic, or psychological and organisational facets [25].

Dogs appear in literature in many contexts as they are one of the most commonly used species by humans for sport and recreation [32]. These are mainly studies providing an overview of the disciplines of sporting cynology including a number of new forms of recreation and sport involving dogs [17, 26]. In Poland, obedience, agility, frisbee and flyball are becoming increasingly popular [16]. Examples of broader characteristics of selected recreational forms include dog-trekking as a form of recreation and family tourism [11], agility [34], mantrailing [38] or obedience [30]. The aspects of choosing a dog for tracking, training programmes, motivation for olfactory work, laying tracks and evaluating progress in tracking are included, among others, in the works of B. Górny [14] and G. Johnson [19]. A separate group of publications concerns the use of dogs in uniformed services [6, 13]. Dog ownership goes far beyond physical benefits of the owner [2, 4, 8, 9, 15, 22]. The dog is often described in the scientific literature as a family member [3, 24, 37].

The results of a survey conducted among residents of Warsaw and Poznań regarding daily sport and recreational activities of dog owners are included in the paper by A. Teodorowicz and M. Woźniewicz-Dobrzyńska [33]. It shows, as in other such studies [5, 7, 20, 23], that owning a dog has a significant impact on the owner's physical activity. These issues fall within a wider body of research on the impact of pet ownership on owners' physical activity levels [10, 12, 27, 28, 29, 35, 39, 40].

## Materials and methods

The scientific method applied was a diagnostic survey – a questionnaire consisting of questions designed by the authors. The study covered people who practise or have practised tracking in Poland. A survey questionnaire in the form of Google form was used. The form was filled in by members of the group “Tropienie użytkowe/ Mantrailing Poland”, functioning on the Internet facebook portal. It is a public group with about 2400 members (2020). According to the group description, they are enthusiasts of tracking, using the mentioned platform to exchange information about tracking events, trainings, seminars, camps, etc. The survey questionnaire was completed by 105 people, who represented 5.53% of the group to whom the request was sent. The survey was conducted between 11.02.2020 and 9.04.2020. The survey questionnaire consisted of 24 main questions, including 16 closed and 8 open ones and a metric covering 18 issues. The selection of the content and layout of the questions in the survey questionnaire was preceded by the authors’ active participation in mantrailing and discussions with the organisers of the mantrailing workshops in late 2019 and early 2020.

According to the questionnaire, 85% of the respondents were female. The largest group were the respondents whose age ranged from 25–44 (73.3%) and 45–64 (19%). In the vast majority (80%), the surveyed amateurs of mantrailing originated from a city. As far as education is concerned, higher education (master’s degree 67.6%, bachelor’s degree 16.2%) prevailed among the respondents. Most of the respondents assessed their material situation positively (rather good – 68.6%, definitely good – 25.7%). These were mostly people working in private companies (33.3%) or running their own business (29.5%). A very small group were, for example, pensioners (3.8%), unemployed (1.9%) and pupils and students (7.6%). The surveyed population consisted of people who have been mantrailing or practising mantrailing for: more than 5 years (18.1%), between one and five years (56.2%) and less than one year (25.7%).

## Study results

The structure of the forms of tracing practised by the respondents comprises the following: tracking (89.5% of respondents), sport and tracking (4.8%), sport tracking (2.9%), hunting tracking (1.9%), hunting and tracking (1.0%). As a result of the survey, it was found out that the primary motives for mantrailing in Poland are:

- getting to know the needs, suitability, activity of (my) dog (87.6% of respondents),
- the need to get to know the attributes of (my) dog in field work conditions (57.1%),

- (my own) need for active recreation (38.1%),
- the need for contact with the natural environment (28.6%),
- the need to belong to a group, to be with close people (19.0%),
- preparing the dog for professional work, e.g. in rescue (6.7%),
- giving pleasure to the dog, enjoyment of the dog (4.8%).

Mantrailing, as proven in an additional question, is for 41% of the respondents a complementary or preparatory activity for their dogs in the form of sport, recreation or rehabilitation. For the majority of mantrailers (61%), passing exams and obtaining certifications in tracking is not important. Among the amateurs of mantrailing who see the importance of obtaining certificates, the dominant reasons were:

- a test, verification of skills acquired during training in different conditions, including stress,
- setting an additional goal, striving for it or the confidence of achieving it,
- motivation to participate in trainings,
- the desire to help people after certification,
- personal satisfaction.

When asked whether competition between mantrailing participants is present and whether it is important to them, only 3% answered affirmatively. The rest of the respondents either believe that such a phenomenon does not exist (49.5%) or that they have observed it but it is not important to them. Moreover, it was pointed out that competition is unjustified due to the impossibility of comparing successive „tracks”. Even training in the same place but at a different time of day is already a different challenge – and can't be compared. Excessive competition has destroyed many forms of recreation, especially dog recreation, and has led to atomisation of the environment, where participation in an event counts less and less, and the importance of winning increases. It has also been argued that rivalry can get in the way of running a group, and that the latter exists between those who award certificates and those who participate in search operations. Finally, it has a negative effect on dogs that are put under too much pressure.

The respondents classified mantrailing as a year-round activity, with fewer than 5% of the respondents practising it only in the summer season. They defined this form of recreation as outdoor activities in all terrain conditions (90.5%) or outdoor activities only in certain terrain conditions.

From among a range of potential motivating factors for mantrailing recreational activities, four response options were included in the survey form (Table 1).

The amateurs of tracking indicated the cognitive motive as the dominant one. Among a wide range of functions of physical recreation, in the case of mantrailing they indicated mainly leisure and educational ones (Table 2). Among human character traits influenced by mantrailing, patience was mentioned by far the most frequently (93.3%). Next to responsibility (45.7%), independence, attentiveness, humility, perceptiveness, the ability to read and trust the dog were also men-

tioned. A person with a high quality of life is a person that is satisfied with their relationships with other people, with their health, with self-development, and who can also see a sense of purpose in their own existence. The amateurs of mantrailing were able to determine which spheres of human life their passion has an impact on in terms of improving the quality of life. M. Straś-Romanowska [31] distinguished four dimensions of quality of life: psycho-social, psycho-physical, subjective and metaphysical, i.e. spiritual. The amateur mantrailers most often mentioned the following spheres: subjectivity (78.1%), psycho-social (social) (44.8%), psycho-physical (biological) (43.8%), and security (29.5%). The psycho-physical sphere is concerned with broadly understood bodily functions and drives of a person. The psycho-social sphere (also called the social sphere) provides a sense of belonging, safety and social identity. The manifestation of the sphere of subjectivity is the realisation of personal interests, goals, helping to achieve self-realisation and authentic life. The metaphysical sphere includes timeless values such as goodness, truth, love, etc.

**Table 1.** Motives of activity of the mantrailing participants

Cognitive motive (to increase knowledge, expand knowledge of the world, increase general culture, use cultural goods, interact with local people)	68,6%
The motif of change (to escape from everyday life, change of environment, to search for otherness, variety, return to nature, to search for silence, beauty, peace, and sometimes solitude)	59,0%
Leisure and health motive (recovery, regeneration and healing, restoration of powers used up during work)	56,2%
Business motive (business trips, seminars, trainings, incentive trips, etc.)	15,2%

Source: own study.

**Table 2.** Functions of mantrailing

Leisure function	79,0%
Learning function	67,6%
Health function	23,8%
Educational function	22,9%
Cultural education function	3,8%

Source: own study.

The attitude of family members to the interest in mantrailing was assessed by the respondents in 67.5% as positive or neutral (30.5%) and only in two cases out of more than 100 respondents, the dog passion of the respondents was negatively perceived. However, the beginning of the respondents' interest in mantrailing should not be attributed to encouragement from family members (only 11.4% of

cases), including parents (2.9%). The main sources of information about tracking at the beginning of the adventure with this form of recreation were the Internet (forums, facebook, websites) (27.6%), courses, seminars, workshops and training (23.8%) and direct information from friends. These information channels are complemented by information from veterinarians or behaviourists (7.6%) and from trade books and magazines (4.8%).

The concept of recreation is considered to be a set of activities and behaviours undertaken by an individual in their free time and associated with leisure after work [21]. An important element of the description of the profile of a person practising mantrailing is the frequency with which they go out into the field with their canine partner. More than half of the people answered that once a week. Even more often, i.e. two to five times a week, mantrailing is practised by 16.2% of the respondents and only one in ten comes across this form of recreation only during dog training and workshops. The mantrailing amateurs, taking into account the intensity of effort and using the delimitation of S. Toczek-Werner [36], classify it as a moderately intensive human activity (56.2%). Activities such as skating or gymnastics were assigned to this category in the survey question. A significant group chose the level of relaxation activities (34.3%) (walking and fishing were included in the question for comparison). Similarly, with regard to the level of difficulty (technical complexity), most people classified mantrailing as a moderately difficult activity (51.4%) (the question included a comparison with football, skating). One third considered it as difficult (skiing, climbing) and the rest as easy (running, cycling).

The mantrailing practitioners were asked to self-assess their health and physical condition by answering six additional questions in the metric. The vast majority of the respondents described their health as satisfactory, with 54.3% describing it as good and 34.3% as very good. More than two thirds of the respondents when asked if they consider themselves to be physically fit said rather yes and almost one third said definitely yes. Excluding from the statistics the 40% of the respondents who declare that they do not experience health problems, the remaining group suffered from visual impairment (22.9%), diseases of: motor organs (26.7%), digestive system (14.3%), respiratory system (13.3%), circulatory system (6.7%) and mental disorders (9.5%). The forms of activities indicated by the respondents are primarily all: cycling, running, walking, and with dogs: nose-work, dogtrekking and olfactory detection [38].

The frequency distribution of physical exercise (excluding mantrailing) reported by the respondents in the questionnaire is as follows: (a) 3–5 times per week and more often (54.3% of the respondents), (b) 1–2 times a week (23.8%), (c) less than once a month (7.6%), and (d) not at all (14.3%). The survey also identified the hourly range of the respondents' one-time physical activity (excluding mantrailing): (a) I do not undertake physical activity (11.4%), (b) up to half an hour (5.7%), (c) half an hour to an hour (32.4%), (d) one to two hours (42.9%), and (e) more than two hours (7.6%) [38].

The hypothesis of the authors of the study about strong feminization of the mantrailing environment in Poland was confirmed by more than 80% of the respondents. However, the respondents were not able to indicate the predominant features of a person practising tracking (or of a dog), which would predispose such a sex ratio of people involved in mantrailing. They are also aware of the general predominance of women in dog-related activities, including dog sports and the guiding profession.

There are as many ways of using dogs, shaped over centuries, as numerous the breeds and their divisions in terms of different characteristics and predispositions are [18]. There is no unanimity among the respondents regarding the breeds of dogs preferred for mantrailing. Statistically, in the yes/no answer variant, in less than half of the cases (46.7%), the respondents considered that there were breeds preferred by them in tracking. Moreover, they most often mentioned the German Shepherd Dog, the Belgian Malinois or used the broader phrase „hunting breeds”, yet with a very wide range of other breeds mentioned at the same time.

Over the centuries, not only has the role of the dog in human life changed, but above all the attitude towards them has as owners not only want to learn how to better coexist with them, but also how to establish a strong bond and understanding [18]. Only one in five respondents, when asked who they test more in mantrailing, namely themselves or their dog, indicated the dog. The majority of people practising mantrailing (94.3%) declared that this form of recreation helped them to „read” their dog properly.

Given the desired widest possible participation of the public in tourism and recreation, the phenomenon of „tourism exclusion” is becoming a priority direction in research on the activity of the public at large [1]. Therefore, it is necessary to contemplate the limitations for mantrailing in Poland. According to the respondents, the main inhibitors of tracking are lack of time (50.5%) and lack of money (49.5%), and further in the order of importance: household (28.6%) and business (27.6%) obligations, lack of time off and appropriate offer of „camps” (19% each). Relatively few mantrailing enthusiasts complain about organizational errors and unprepared instructors (2.9%) and limited access to places where mantrailing can be practised (12.4%). Few people are also convinced that their dog „can't cope” (6.7%).

## Conclusions

The research carried out is exploratory in nature and the conclusions cannot apply to the entire community of people who practise mantrailing in Poland. In the pattern of forms of tracking practiced by the respondents, mantrailing is predominant. The main motives for practising mantrailing in Poland are determining the needs, predispositions and activity of the dog and the desire to learn about its



features directly in the field. It is not, however, about passing exams and obtaining certificates in tracking, or the aspect of competition. Among a wide range of functions of mantrailing, mainly leisure and educational functions are indicated, and among shaping human traits – patience.

People interested in mantrailing in Poland are a relatively young and well-educated group, and therefore opinion-forming. Civilisation progress is accompanied by an increase in the wealth of societies, which allows for the performance of leisure time activities and, in this context, the mantrailing amateurs assess their material situation positively. However, the main inhibitors of tracking in Poland are lack of time and financial resources. The vast majority of amateur mantrailers come from the city, which confirms the general trend that urban population is more physically active. In the case of tracking, the predominance of women in dog-related activities is also confirmed.

The vast majority of people who practise mantrailing claim that this form of recreation has helped them to „read” their dog properly. The list of breeds with which people do mantrailing is extremely varied with no strict list of breeds that they consider preferable for this form of recreation. Mantrailing is a year-round outdoor activity, in all terrain conditions.

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