

# The Polish Road to the EPP

The following article is a telling on Poland's journey into EPP. You can read some of the challenges there might be, and how Poland is trying to fix this.

Enjoy the reading below the pictures // Morten Juul Madsen, EPP secretary



Article by: Bartosz Sawicki, January 2024

## Polish lowland canoeing

Canoe tourism is a popular activity in Poland. Every summer, hundreds of thousands of people enjoy Polish canoe routes. These trips are usually with family or friends. Many companies offer canoe rentals, transportation, and other necessary arrangements to make the holiday enjoyable.

The most of Poland's lowland rivers flow peacefully through beautiful forests and lakes. These are ideal conditions for families with children to safely enjoy nature. However, there is also a group of kayakers who seek challenges. Poland has very few difficult

canoe/kayak trails. We have some whitewater rivers, but they are only navigable in spring. We also have the sea with beautiful sandy beaches, which is quite monotonous from a kayaking perspective. Therefore, adventure kayakers travel the world and train to paddle there safely.

## **History of PSKK**

Poland's academic canoe clubs have a strong training tradition, regularly offering courses in whitewater kayaking on alpine rivers. In 2009, after an intense online discussion involving dozens of participants from across the country, a common training system was proposed.

The first official version of the Polish Canoeing Qualification System (PSKK) was created in 2011. The PSKK is a canoeing skills system that draws on the Polish training tradition, but is also compatible with widely recognized international training systems such as British BC, American ACA, and European EPP.

It consists of four types of canoeing: kayak lowland, kayak whitewater, kayak sea, and canoeing. The system is divided into five steps, and a group of 85 trained verifiers organises meetings where one can test their skills and receive an adequate certificate. The PSKK was officially incorporated into the canoe instructor training system of the Polish Canoe Association (PZKaj) in 2022. As a result, all canoe guides and instructors are required to possess the individual skills outlined in the 5 degrees of the PSKK.

## **Why EPP?**

The PSKK's original aim was to align with international training systems. Joining the EPP will ensure that Polish canoeing develops similarly to other European countries. It is easier to keep track of new training trends, available technology, and social changes in a group of experts from different countries. Therefore, we believe it is worth joining the community of European kayakers.

The list of specific reasons why Poland wants to join the EPP is long:

- we want the training of Polish kayakers to allow them to safely paddle on water in other countries,
- we see a value of cooperation between Polish and foreign instructors,
- we count on the Polish community to integrate around training in accordance with international standards,
- we want to learn from others, but also to promote the Polish kayaking speciality "zwalka",
- we want to work together to develop new training standards, e.g. for SUP,
- we see an opportunity for joint, international kayaking projects,
- and last but not least, we think it is a great fun to have kayak friends in other countries.

## **Joining EPP**

A team of Polish representatives (Anna, Rafał and Bartosz) came with great curiosity to the EPP Core Meeting in Oslo in the spring of 2023. There, we met the core of the EPP leadership, who warmly welcomed us. After returning to Poland, we have presented our

ideas and enthusiasm to the Board of the PZKaj. However, it turned out to be more complicated than we initially thought. There have been many formal and informal discussions in recent months, but a final decision has not yet been made. Recreational canoeing has a low priority in the competitive sport association due to financial constraints. The current budget of the recreational canoeing committee cannot cover the annual EPP membership fee. We are attempting to raise special funds for this long-term mission.

The community of Senior Instructors, consisting of 28 highly experienced individuals, is responsible for all recreational canoe trainings in Poland. We plan and organise training events for guides and instructors. Within this group, we all agree that joining the European canoe family has a huge value, so I am fully convinced that we will soon make it happen.



