

Paddling in Ukraine

by Dmitry Medvedyev

I was introduced to the paddle sport by my university class-mate at the age of 18. Back then the only options I knew were available in my home town were flatwater kayak and canoe and rowing. Kyiv is located on the banks of the beautiful Dniper river, one of the largest rivers in Europe and I often saw all of these kinds of paddle crafts at the same time when crossing the river by the metro bridge.



The main river is pretty wide and paddling it would feel a bit like paddling Sydney's middle harbour, so we would normally use bays and branches of the river.

When I was growing up in Ukraine, it was still an old Soviet Union system - all sports were free of charge, including equipment. The better you paddle - the nicer boat or paddle you get.

We could paddle quite far away from our club, but I can't remember doing anything longer than 30km in a single session. Anyway, the only discipline I was reasonably good at was a short sprint, so even when I found out about other options such as marathon paddling, or white-water slalom, they did not attract my attention.

I guess one of the main differences compared to my Australian paddling experience is that you can't really paddle a frozen river, so we normally were off the water from November till April doing other kinds of training like weight lifting in the gym and swimming. One could still find bits and pieces of warm enough water in industrial setups such as water channels coming from the power plants, I trained like that for one winter and it's not much fun at all.

The main focus these days was definitely on sprint paddling, I don't think that marathon was anywhere close to the sprint in terms of participation, and there were not at all many masters paddling or racing around either. That is quite contrasting to Australia where there are lots of masters doing marathons and ocean racing.

It changed quite a bit about 15 years ago when the dragon boats started appearing - somehow they became very appealing to all these ex-paddlers who were still competitive, but not quite up to racing with the young guys in sprints. In recent times this sport has grown a lot in Ukraine and new varieties have emerged as well, such as SUPs and outriggers - these were nowhere to be seen in my young days.

As for me, once I moved to Australia for good, I found that there's not much sprint racing happening here for masters, so I had to learn how to race 20km instead of 200m, and now I have the very best competition right on my new home grounds.

Below: Dmitry in action at the LCRK Marathon in April 2021 – when we used to be able to paddle!
Photo: Tom Holloway. Larger resolution pic on the LCRK Flickr pages [here](#)

