

1 Article

2 Assessment of enjoyment and intensity of physical 3 activity in immersive virtual reality on the 4 omni-directional Omni treadmill and Icaros flight 5 simulator in the context of recommendations for 6 health

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15 **Abstract:** The aim of the study is to assess enjoyment and intensity of physical exercise while
16 practicing physical activity (PA) in immersive virtual reality (IVR) using innovative training
17 devices (omni-directional Omni treadmill and Icaros Pro flight simulator). The study also contains
18 the results of subjective research on the usefulness of such a form of PA in the opinion of users. In
19 total, 61 adults (10 women and 50 men) took part in the study. To assess the enjoyment level (EL)
20 Interest/Enjoyment subscale of Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) was used. Exercise intensity
21 was assessed during 10-minute sessions of active video games (AVGs) in IVR based on heart rate
22 (HR). The average enjoyment level during physical exercise in IVR on the tested training devices
23 was relatively high (Omni 5.74 points, Icaros 5.60 points). In the opinion of the majority of
24 participants, AVGs on IVR training devices constitute a sufficiently useful form of movement to
25 meet the needs of PA practiced in free time, and they can even replace some of the classic forms of
26 movement. Intensity of PA during games on training devices was at the level recommended for
27 health benefits for 92% (Omni) and 84% (Icaros Pro) of its duration. Based on the conducted
28 research, it can be assumed that AVGs in IVR using a multi-directional treadmill and a flight
29 simulator can be an effective tool for increasing participation in health-oriented PA.

30 **Keywords:** health-oriented physical activity ; immersive virtual reality, virtual reality; intensity of
31 physical activity

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34 1. Introduction

35 The lack of movement (hypokinesia) is the main cause of the incidence of chronic
36 non-communicable diseases, causing 71% of all deaths per year, including as much as 40% of
37 premature deaths [1]. Therefore, health promotion activities are currently focused on searching for
38 tools popularizing modern physical activity (PA), attractive for people, tailored to their interests,
39 fitness abilities and leisure time budgets.

40 The development of modern technology is considered to be one of the reasons for the
41 decreasing PA level in everyday life [2]. Due to the fact that they constitute an inseparable element of
42 the development of civilization in recent years, technological innovations have been used to
43 popularize PA among the public. The first manifestation of this action was the creation of active

44 video games (AVGs), in which the player controls the course of the game with movements of his/her
45 body, becoming its active participant and not a passive player. Subsequently, the so-called
46 “Exergames” were introduced, i.e. differentiated interactive training programs, often with the
47 assistance of a virtual trainer, the goal of which is PA.

48 So far, published scientific reports confirm a high level of enjoyment during various AVGs and
49 exergames [3–5]. It should be noted that according to the results of research on components of
50 behavioral engagement in performing PA, enjoyment is its significant predictor, regardless of age of
51 the study participants [6–9] and their health status [10–12]. It was also observed that due to the high
52 rating of the attractiveness of games of this type, players are able to perform PA longer in an
53 interactive form, compared to classic PA, which may translate into better health effects [13].

54 In addition, the results of monitoring the parameters of physical exercise during many active
55 video games showed that their values are at the level recommended for health by international
56 organizations [14–19] and contribute to the health benefits of both healthy people [13,20,21] and
57 patients [22–24].

58 Another aspect of using technological progress in improving public health is the transfer of
59 AVG to virtual reality (VR) – a computer-created space to which users move using special goggles.
60 These goggles enable the players to be cut off from the real world, making them part of the game and
61 multiplying the emotions they experiences during it [25]. This most advanced technique, enabling
62 the highest degree of realism in which a person is cut off from the visual and auditory stimuli of the
63 real environment, and instead receives the image and sound, and even tactile sensations of the
64 simulated world, is often referred to as immersive virtual reality (IVR) [26,27].

65 Analysis of the few research studies concerning PA in VR that have been created over the last
66 few years, indicates the possibilities of using this modern technology in physiotherapy. A study
67 conducted by Baños et al. [28] shows that walking on a treadmill performed in the virtual world can
68 be better tolerated by obese children than the same physical effort in a traditional form. VR allows
69 for the distraction of the participants from the discomfort that accompanies PA. In addition, moving
70 around in VR turned out to be more attractive to obese children than a typical treadmill walk.
71 According to the authors, the use of VR technology in training programs may be a factor increasing
72 motivation to exercise, which may be important in the prevention of overweight and in the fight
73 against obesity. It seems that the reduced feeling of discomfort during exercise in a virtual
74 environment and the attractiveness of this type of PA can be also used in therapeutic treatment in
75 patients with other dysfunctions, which are accompanied by various ailments associated with
76 physical effort. Reports by Baños et al. [28] seem to confirm the results of a study conducted by
77 Matsangidou et al. [29], which showed that PA in VR can affect the perception of pain observed
78 during isometric exercise, which results in lower subjective perception of exercise severity and,
79 consequently, the possibility of continuing the activity and a higher assessment of its attractiveness
80 in comparison with PA performed in a classical manner.

81 Due to the growing popularity of PA in a virtual environment, special training devices for
82 training in VR began to be created. Omni-directional treadmills, flight and diving simulators, cycling
83 simulators etc. are created, enabling active movement in the virtual world. These training devices
84 are equipped with sensors that reflect the user’s body movements in VR. Thanks to the devices for
85 PA in VR, the users becomes a part of the artificially created world, and the movements of their body
86 control the course of a chosen game, sports training or visiting virtual destinations [25,30].

87 Previously published articles on PA in VR focus on the possibility of its implementation in
88 public health activities. Many publications emphasize the potential of this form of movement,
89 recognizing it as a modern trend in healthcare [31,32], mainly in the field of secondary prevention
90 [28,33,34]. However, there are no scientific reports verifying the level of enjoyment and parameters
91 of physical exercise in the context of pro-health recommendations, during such a form of PA in the
92 case of people without a diagnosed disease, which is the basis for assessing its suitability in the
93 universal health promotion and prevention of. Moreover, in literature there are currently no
94 publications presenting the results of research on this issue with the use of special training devices
95 for PA in VR.

96 In connection with the above, the aim of the study was to evaluate enjoyment and intensity of
97 physical effort while practicing physical activity in immersive VR using innovative training devices
98 (omni-directional Omni treadmill and Icaros Pro flight simulator). The study also contains the
99 results of subjective research on the usefulness of such a form of physical effort in the opinion of
100 users.

101 2. Materials and Methods

102 2.1. Participants

103 Sixty-one adults participated in the study recruited from among participants of the Silesian
104 Festival of Science (Poland), where equipment and software allowing for PA in VR was presented.
105 Inclusion criteria included: age (>18), signing a statement about good general health and the lack of
106 medical contraindicators to participate in the study (physical limitations affecting exercise e.g.:
107 pregnancy, injury, etc., no history of seizures or epilepsy, taking any medications affecting heart
108 rate). In the studies using the Omni treadmill (Virtuix) (Fig. 1) thirty-six adults participated,
109 including six women (age 28.3 ± 11.6 , height 168.2 ± 5.8 , weight 61.3 ± 5.6) and thirty men (age 25.6 ± 8.2 ,
110 height 179.2 ± 5.9 , weight 80.0 ± 10.2). Icaros Pro flight simulator (Icaros GmbH) (Fig. 2) was tested by
111 twenty-five people: four women (age 32.0 ± 13.0 , height 165.5 ± 5.9 , weight 61.0 ± 7.2) and twenty-one
112 men (age 24.7 ± 8.6 , height 178.4 ± 7.2 , weight 77.7 ± 10.5). Among all the studied people, eleven young
113 men (age 19.7 ± 2.5 , height 176.3 ± 6.3 , weight 74.0 ± 9.9) completed training sessions on both training
114 devices, therefore the comparison of intensity of physical activity and the enjoyment level during PA
115 on selected training devices applied to part of the group only.

116 More than half of the participants (34 people) declared that they had previously experienced
117 immersive VR using computer games using VR headset, while no one had previously had the
118 opportunity to practice PA in virtual reality on the tested training devices.

120 2.2. Procedures

121 The research procedure consisted of a 10-minute session of an active video game on at least one
122 of the two studied simulators. Before proceeding to the above research activities, the researchers
123 matched the devices to the participant's height, explained the purpose of the game and explained
124 how to use it and move in VR. Then a 2-minute trial game took place, followed by a proper game
125 that lasted 10 minutes. Users could stop participating in the study at any time. In the group that
126 tested both devices, training sessions were held in the following order: Omni treadmill (O)
127 (dominance of aerobic endurance exercise), Icaros Pro (I) flight simulator (dominance of strength
128 endurance exercise) and a 30-minute break to rest between them.

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Figure 1. Omni-directional Omni treadmill enabling locomotive movements in VR

Source: author's elaboration



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138 **Figure 2.** Icaros Pro – flight simulator in VR

139 Source: author's elaboration

140 141 2.3. Methods and tools

142 The game using Omni treadmill "Travar Training OPS" consisted of covering the obstacle course
143 and shooting the indicated targets in the shortest possible time. The necessity to cover the designated
144 course forced the player to perform locomotive movements (walking, running). VR image projection
145 and control of the movement of the upper limbs while moving on the treadmill were carried out
146 thanks to the HTC VIVE goggles and controllers co-operating with the Omni platform. The goal of the
147 "Flight" game on the Icaros Pro flight simulator was to control a flying ship by moving the body in a
148 position supporting themselves on the forearms and lower legs. The activity was more static than
149 moving on the Omni treadmill, and piloting required the player to constantly control the position of
150 their body and balance in space by appropriate tightening and loosening of the muscles. For the
151 projection of the VR image, Samsung Gear goggles were used.

152 For the assessment of the enjoyment level (EL) Interest/Enjoyment subscale of Intrinsic
153 Motivation Inventory (IMI) was used [35]. It is a multidimensional measurement grounded on the
154 Self-Determination Theory (SDT) used in assessing the subjective experiences of participants when
155 developing an activity [36]. The Interest/Enjoyment subscale assesses the interest and inherent
156 pleasure when doing a specific activity. It has been used in previous virtual reality exercise studies
157 [3,21,37] and has shown good reliability and validity [35]. According to the inventory instruction
158 participants ranked their agreement with each statement on a Likert scale of 1 ("not at all true") to 7
159 ("very true"). Responses were averaged to create the overall enjoyment scale scores (range 1–7). The
160 subjective assessment of the suitability of PA in VR on the studied training devices was verified using
161 the author's own questionnaire containing 5 questions with a "yes or no" scale. The participants were
162 asked the following questions: If you had an Omni treadmill/Icaros device, would you perform
163 physical activity in VR? Would you recommend practicing physical activity in VR on the Omni
164 treadmill/Icaros device to others?; Do you think that practicing physical activity on the Omni
165 treadmill/Icaros device can be a supplement to physical activity of an aerobic/strength nature
166 (exercises in a support position) in free time?; Do you think that practicing physical activity on the
167 Omni treadmill/Icaros device can meet the needs related to physical activity performed in free time
168 in the field of locomotion exercises (walking, running) (Omni)/in the area of exercises in a support
169 position (Icaros)?; Do you think that physical activity on the Omni treadmill/Icaros device can replace
170 typical, real forms of physical activity in free time, such as: walking, running (Omni)/typical exercises
171 in a support position (Icaros)? On the basis of the participants' answers, fractions of the participants
172 assessing the abovementioned aspects of usefulness PA in VR positively (yes) and negatively (no)
173 were calculated.

174 During AVGs on the training devices, heart rate (HR) was monitored using the Vantage V pulse
175 meter by Polar. The intensity of physical exercise was determined on the basis of the average
176 percentage of maximum heart rate (% HRmax) obtained by each participant during the test.

177 Previously, the HRmax value was calculated from the formula by Tanaka et al. [38]. The exercise load
178 was estimated based on the PA intensity classification proposed by the American Heart Association
179 [39]. According to it, $HR_{avg} < 50\%HR_{max}$ means low intensity, $50\%HR_{max} \leq HR_{avg} < 70\%HR_{max}$ -
180 moderate, and $HR_{avg} \geq 70\%HR_{max}$ - high. The data obtained in this manner was referred to the criteria
181 of health-related recommendations in the scope of intensity of aerobic physical exercises, according to
182 which those of at least moderate intensity ($\geq 50\%HR_{max}$) are beneficial for health [40,41]. The total time
183 of HR maintenance during a 10-minute effort on the tested training devices was also estimated in three
184 intensity zones: low, moderate and high.

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186 2.4. Ethics

187 The study procedures were reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the
188 Jerzy Kukuczka Academy of Physical Education in Katowice (protocol code – 9/2018, date of approval
189 – 2018.04.19). It was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants took
190 part in the study voluntarily and could discontinue their participation at any time. They have
191 provided written consent for the use of information collected during examination.

192

193 2.5. Statistical Analysis

194 Statistica 13.0 (StatSoft, Inc.) was used to carry out statistical calculations. The analysis of measurement
195 data was carried out using basic descriptive statistics. The results of the survey were presented in
196 percentages. The consistency of the distribution was estimated using the Shapiro-Wilk test. The
197 non-parametric Wilcoxon test was used to assess the significance of the differences between the mean
198 values of results during PA on O and I.

199 3. Results

200 3.1. Enjoyment level

201 In the group having the Omni a session, the average enjoyment level (EL) during physical
202 activity was 5.74 ± 0.86 points, while in those testing the Icaros flight simulator it was 5.60 ± 0.88 on a
203 1-7 Likert scale. Comparing the results for excitement/interest subscale of IMI of the participants
204 who completed their training sessions on both training devices demonstrated significant
205 differentiation ($p < 0.01$) of the EL in favor of PA on the first training device (Omni: 6.13 ± 0.9 ; Icaros:
206 5.18 ± 0.7 points).

207

208 3.2. Intensity level in the context of health recommendations

209 The average heart rate during PA in VR on the omni-directional Omni treadmill was 149.5 ± 22.3
210 bpm and was significantly higher ($p < 0.01$) than observed on the Icaros Pro flight simulator –
211 121.4 ± 18.0 bpm. A similar statistically significant relationship was found analyzing the average
212 percentage of maximum heart rate (% HRmax). The estimated parameter for people playing on the
213 treadmill was 76.8% HRmax (high intensity) and it was significantly higher ($p < 0.01$) than on Icaros
214 Pro - 62.5% HRmax (moderate intensity). It is worth noting that for all subjects, regardless of the
215 training device used, the intensity of physical activity exceeded 50% of HRmax, and was therefore
216 sufficient to obtain health benefits [39–41] (Fig. 3). For the vast majority of time practicing PA in VR
217 on both training devices, the intensity of exercise remained at a pro-health (moderate or high) level.
218 In the case of training on the Omni treadmill, the health-beneficial effort lasted for 92% (552s), and
219 on the Icaros Pro flight simulator for 84% (502.4s) of the duration of the game. During training, on
220 the first of these devices PA with high intensity of 74% (441.8s) clearly dominated, while practicing
221 AVGs on the second training device was mainly associated with moderately intense physical
222 activity - 57% (339.4s) (Fig. 4).

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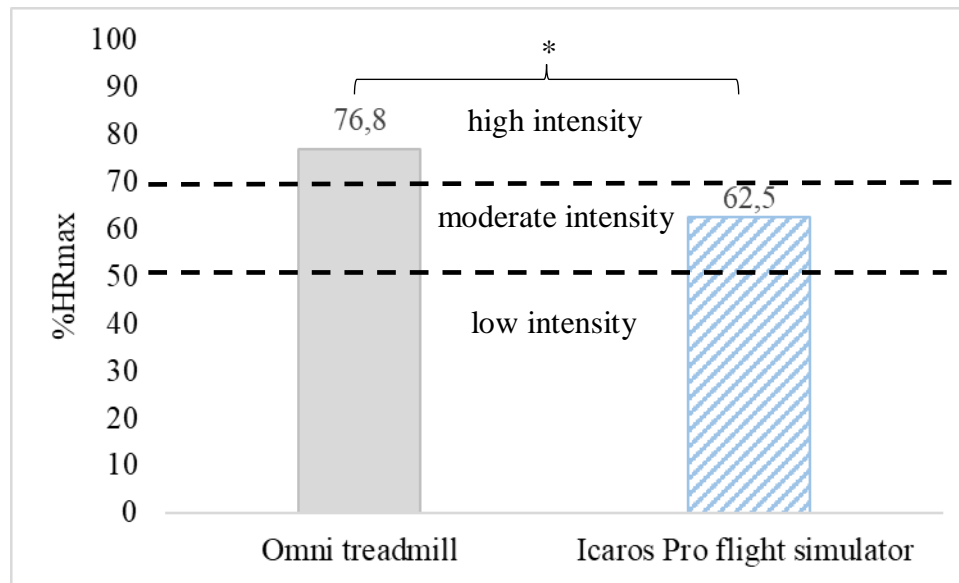


Figure 3. Average intensity of physical effort during AVGs in VR on the Omni treadmill and Icaros Pro flight simulator, * – $p < 0.01$

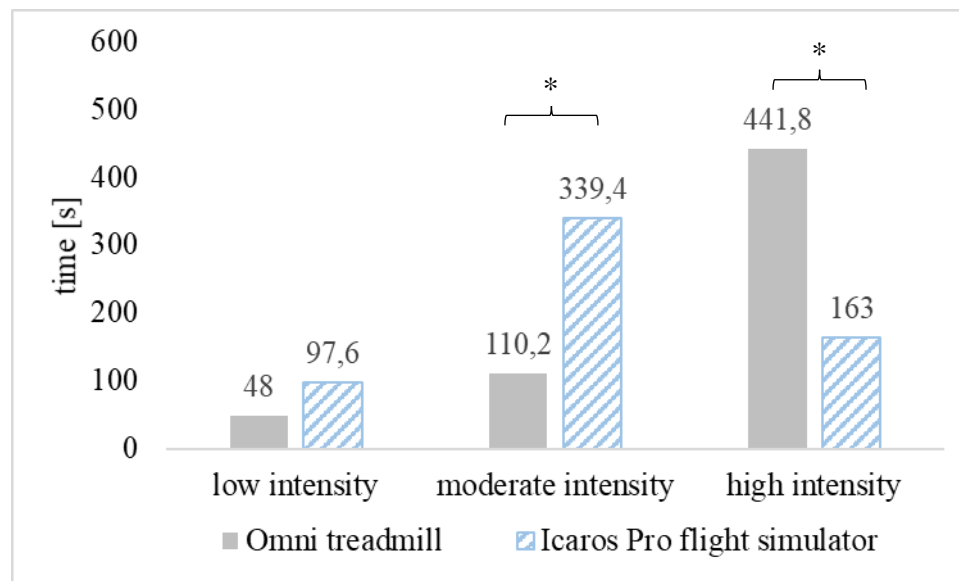


Figure 4. Duration of physical activity at different intensity intervals when practicing 10-minute AVGs on the Omni treadmill and Icaros Pro flight simulator, * – $p < 0.01$

3.3. Usefulness of physical activity in VR with the use of innovative training devices in the opinion of the participants of the study

The vast majority of people testing Omni (92%) and Icaros Pro (88%) devices claimed that having this type of training devices they would be practicing PA in VR. Almost every user of the treadmill (97%) and flight simulator (96%) would recommend PA on the tested devices to others.

All the participants were convinced that practicing PA on both training devices could be supplementary to PA practiced in free time. A clear majority of users of the multidirectional treadmill (72%) were of the opinion that training in VR on this device can meet the needs of PA practiced in free time in the field of locomotion-based exercises (walking, running). An even more numerous representations of the participants exercising on Icaros (80%) had a similar view on the subject of the tested flight simulator in the context of the possibility of performing exercises in a

281 support position on this training device. A large proportion of people training on the treadmill (44%)
 282 were even of the opinion that PA on the Omni platform can replace typical, real forms of physical
 283 activity practiced in free time, such as walking and running. However, most participants testing
 284 Icaros (60%) were convinced that simulator training is able to replace typical exercises in a support
 285 position (Table 1).
 286

287 **Table 1.** Usefulness of physical activity in VR using innovative training devices (omni-directional Omni
 288 treadmill and Icaros Pro flight simulator) in the assessment of study participants
 289

Question	Omni users (n=36)		Icaros users (n=25)	
	Yes/ Agree	No/ Disagree	Yes/ Agree	No/ Disagree
If you had an Omni treadmill/Icaros device, would you perform physical activity in VR?	92%	8%	88%	12%
Would you recommend practicing physical activity in VR on the Omni treadmill/Icaros device to others?	97%	3%	96%	4%
Do you think that practicing physical activity on the Omni treadmill/Icaros device can be a supplement to physical activity of an aerobic/strength nature (exercises in a support position) in free time?	100%	0%	100%	0%
Do you think that practicing physical activity on the Omni treadmill/Icaros device can meet the needs related to physical activity performed in free time in the field of locomotion exercises (walking, running) (Omni)/in the area of exercises in a support position (Icaros)?	72%	28%	80%	20%
Do you think that physical activity on the Omni treadmill/Icaros device can replace typical, real forms of physical activity in free time, such as: walking, running (Omni)/typical exercises in a support position (Icaros)?	44%	56%	60%	40%

290

291 4. Discussion

292 So far, many studies have been published verifying the pro-health nature and enjoyment of
 293 physical activity during AVGs [5,42–45]. Unlike our study, however, they did not evaluate PA in
 294 immersive VR, in which man is cut off from the visual and auditory stimuli of the real environment,
 295 and instead he/she receives the image and sound of the simulated world. Moreover, there are few
 296 publications aimed at assessing the above-mentioned parameters during PA using innovative VR
 297 training devices. In this context, our study seems original.

298 The assessment of enjoyment during PA is of great importance in shaping the motivational
 299 instruction to take action, which from the perspective of public health is currently, among others,
 300 regular participation in physical activity [9,46]. The results of many studies have shown that
 301 enjoyment is a significant predictor of PA participation regardless of the age of the participants [6–9]
 302 and their health [10–12]. Over the past few years, there have been publications on this topic in the
 303 context of undertaking physical activity in VR. According to the results of these studies, the
 304 attractiveness of various forms of PA in VR is higher in relation to identical forms of PA taken in the
 305 classical way [25,28,29].

306 High enjoyment rating during PA in VR is confirmed by the results of this study. The EL both
307 during physical activity on the Omni treadmill (5.74 ± 0.86 points) as well as on Icaros (5.60 ± 0.88
308 points) was higher than the level demonstrated by other authors verifying the level of this parameter
309 for various active video games [3–5]. Comparison of the enjoyment level during PA between the
310 tested training devices showed a significant difference in favor of the Omni treadmill. The probable
311 reason for this was the need to maintain a proper body balance for continuous 10-minute sessions on
312 Icaros, which was a difficult task for the participants.

313 The high assessment of the usability of PA in VR on training devices is also emphasized by the
314 participants' declarations, which showed that having such training devices they would be happy to
315 train on them and would recommend this form of PA to their friends. The vast majority of study
316 participants were also of the opinion that PA on the Omni treadmill and the Icaros flight simulator is
317 useful enough to meet the needs of PA practiced in free time, and a large part even claimed they
318 could replace some classic forms of PA with it.

319 In the studies presented in this paper, the PA parameters were also evaluated in terms of their
320 health-enhancing character. It turned out that the intensity of physical activity during a game on the
321 tested devices for PA in VR was on average at the level recommended for health benefits for 92%
322 (Omni treadmill) and 84% (Icaros Pro) of its duration. It is worth noting that the average heart rate
323 during the Omni treadmill session (149.5 ± 22.3 bpm) was significantly higher ($p < 0.01$) than that
324 observed on the Icaros Pro flight simulator (121.4 ± 18.0 bpm). This probably results from a different
325 type of exercise on both simulators. Locomotion movements dominated on the treadmill, while
326 physical activity of the flight simulator users consisted mainly in balancing their body in space.

327 Previously published publications emphasize the potential of PA in IVR considering it a
328 modern trend in healthcare [31], mainly in the field of secondary prevention [28,33,34]. The high
329 assessment of the enjoyment level during physical activity in VR and the conviction of its usefulness
330 as an innovative, attractive form of PA with adequate intensity for health benefits, demonstrated in
331 the study, draw attention to the usefulness of PA in VR on the tested training devices in the context
332 of increasing PA adherence. This is very important due to the insufficient participation in PA, often
333 underlined in publications as the most frequent reason for not following pro-health
334 recommendations in this area of behavior and its reasons such as finding it inconvenient to exercise,
335 lack of self-motivation and finding exercises boring [47–50]. Taking into account the positive
336 reception of such solutions by users and the dynamic development of modern computer technology,
337 there are many indications that training devices cooperating with immersive VR can be widely used
338 in the promotion of health and physical rehabilitation.

339 The results of this study should be viewed in the context of several limitations. Due to the lack
340 of other studies on the same issues, further research is necessary to verify the level of physical
341 activity parameters and enjoyment in the case of various games and training programs practiced on
342 training devices in VR, in order to determine those that may constitute a complement or alternative
343 to classic health-oriented forms of PA. The findings of this manuscript should be also investigated in
344 different population groups.

345 5. Conclusions

- 346 1. The average enjoyment level during physical activity in VR on the tested training devices
347 was high. In the case of the Omni treadmill, it was 5.74 points, while in the case of the Icaros
348 flight simulator it was 5.60 points.
- 349 2. In the opinion of the majority of participants, active video games practiced on the
350 omni-directional Omni treadmill and Icaros flight simulator in immersive VR constitute a
351 useful form of movement to meet the needs of PA practiced in free time, and they can even
352 replace some classic forms of movement.
- 353 3. Intensity of PA during games on training devices was at the level recommended to obtain
354 pro-health benefits for 92% (Omni treadmill) and 84% (Icaros Pro flight simulator) of its
355 duration.

- 356 4. The average heart rate during activity sessions on the Omni treadmill (149.5±22.3 bpm) was
 357 significantly higher than that observed on the Icaros Pro flight simulator (121.4±18.0 bpm),
 358 which probably results from a different type of exercise on both training devices. During the
 359 10-minute game on the first device, high intensity physical activity dominated, while in the
 360 case of the second training device - physical activity of moderate intensity dominated.
- 361 5. Due to the fact that in the opinion of users, PA in VR on the tested training devices is an
 362 enjoyable and useful form of movement, and research shows that its intensity is at the level
 363 recommended for obtaining health benefits, it may be assumed that this form of movement
 364 can be an effective tool for increasing participation in health-oriented PA.

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 366 investigation, M.D., J.P., A.M. and P.P.; data curation, M.D., J.P., A.M. and P.P.; writing—original draft
 367 preparation, M.D. and J.P.; writing—review and editing, M.D., J.P., A.M. and P.P.; visualization, M.D. and J.P.;
 368 supervision, M.D. and J.P.; project administration, M.D., J.P.

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