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Real Challenges, Failed Changes: Attempts at Intercollegiate Cooperation within the History Students' Scientific Movement in Poland during the Transformation Period, 1988–1999*

Abstrakt: W artykule omówiono działania adaptacyjne podejmowane przez studentów historii zrzeszonych w kołach naukowych w okresie transformacji ustrojowej. Przeprowadzona analiza obejmuje zarówno szanse, jak i zagrożenia, które pojawiły się w tym okresie oraz konkretne działania podejmowane przez studentów w odpowiedzi na te wyzwania. Autor stara się również zidentyfikować przyczyny, które wpłynęły na niewielką skuteczność podejmowanych prób.

Słowa kluczowe: studenci, transformacja, studencki ruch naukowy, lata 90. XX w., studenci historii, International Students of History Association, organizacje studenckie.

Abstract: The article examines the adaptive strategies undertaken by history students organised within student clubs during the period of transformation in Poland. The analysis considers both the opportunities and challenges that arose during this period and the specific actions students took to address these issues. Additionally, the author seeks to identify the underlying factors contributing to the limited success of these initiatives.

Keywords: Students, transformation, student scientific movement, the 1990s, history students, International Students of History Association, student organisations.

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Initial assumptions

An integral part of Polish academic culture are the *studenckie koła naukowe*¹ – voluntary student associations.² Apolitical by nature, these organisations aim to address students' needs in education, self-development, and, since the 1950s, research activities. They typically comprise students from a single course but may also focus on specific specialities or broader interdisciplinary topics.

Over time, these associations have undergone significant transformations, with three distinct models emerging: the pre-war model (late 19th century–1949), the Stalinist model (1949–1957), and the contemporary model (since 1958). Each period shaped the clubs' roles, activities, funding mechanisms, and legitimacy.³ Under the contemporary model, the primary goal is to engage students in independent research while deepening their subject knowledge.⁴ Moreover, these clubs foster social connections among students with shared interests and serve as a link between students and academic staff.

A key activity during this period was the research camp. Introduced in the late 1960s and declining by the early 1990s, these camps involved practical, curriculum-related projects conducted during summer breaks. Funding was typically provided by university authorities or licensed youth organisations. However, by the late 1990s, the decline of research camps accelerated due to insufficient financial support.⁵ Another common activity was the discussion

¹ The term lacks a direct English equivalent and is often rendered as 'student club', 'science circle', or 'association'. I use the term 'history student club' in this text to avoid terminological inconsistencies. For comparison, similar organisations exist in post-Yugoslav states under names such as *Klub Studenata*, see D. Agičić, 'Klub studenata povijesti Sveučilišta u Zagrebu (1925–41)', *Radovi*, vol. 25, no. 1 (1992), pp. 249–62.

² Notably, the term *naukowe* (scientific) did not appear in the official name of these organisations until the 1950s.

³ Marcelina Smużewska proposes a different classification – interwar, socialist, and contemporary models – primarily reflecting political history turning points rather than a detailed analysis of source materials, see M. Smużewska 'Zorganizowane formy aktywności naukowej polskich studentów z perspektywy teorii ruchów społecznych', *Analecta. Studia i Materiały z Dziejów Nauki*, vol. 22, no. 1–2 (2013), pp. 191–214 (at p. 196); ead., 'Instytucjonalizacja studenckiego ruchu naukowego na przykładzie toruńskiej humanistyki (1945–2010)', *Rocznik Toruński*, vol. 37 (2010), pp. 133–61.

⁴ Similar structures existed in other socialist states, see J. Novotná, 'Studentská vědecká činnost na vysokých školách v socialistických zemích', *Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské university I*, vol. 36, no. 1 22 (1987), pp. 103–14.

⁵ P. Budzyński, 'Studenckie Koło Naukowe Historyków Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego jako uczestnik studenckiego ruchu epigraficznego', in: *Gdańsk jest kluczem do wszystkiego. W poszukiwaniu genius loci miasta*, ed. by W. Borzestowski, A. Siekierska (Kraków, 2019), pp. 81–85; J. Dziechciarz, J. Godula, *Organizacja i funkcjonowanie studenckiego ruchu naukowego* (Warszawa, 1974), pp. 96–102; D. Greulich, 'Uwagi na temat organizacji studenckiego obozu naukowego', *Życie Szkoły Wyższej*, vol. 6–7 (1967), pp. 135–38.

meeting, where lectures were delivered by students, university professors, or invited guests. National scientific sessions also gained popularity, offering a platform for students to present and debate papers on a chosen topic. These sessions were monitored by a jury of professors who participated in discussions and awarded prizes for the best papers. While prizes in the 1980s were limited to books, earlier years saw students receiving substantial financial rewards.

In Polish public discourse, student clubs are often viewed as constituting a student scientific movement. This perspective echoed in some compilations, typically reduces the movement to a historical or descriptive account of individual clubs.⁶ However, this oversimplifies the concept, which extends beyond a mere collection of unrelated organisations.⁷

The authors of the first comprehensive work on this topic adopted a similarly narrow perspective, limiting their focus to organised activities outside formal teaching and educational processes.⁸ Such a definition is limited in scope and inconsistent with the broader understanding of the phenomenon and its historical evolution.

A more colloquial interpretation aligns with Marcelina Smużewska's use of student movement theories.⁹ However, this, too, is problematic, as Ryszard Stemplowski recently argued that Polish student organisations do not meet the criteria for a social movement.¹⁰

Without attempting a comprehensive definition, this article assumes that the student scientific movement functions as a network organisation. In such a network, member clubs collaborate to achieve shared goals, but the network itself does not inherently generate benefits – only its effective utilisation does. As noted, 'the basis of network functioning is cooperation based on the division of goals and competencies, collective work, shared responsibility, and trust'. Addressing the condition of the history student scientific movement during the transformation period thus requires examining not only the opportunities and threats of the time but also the dynamics of relationships within the network.¹¹

This article explores how history student clubs in the 1990s sought to collaborate within the movement to leverage opportunities arising from political

⁶ A record of history in lieu of a definition is also presented in the encyclopedia of Polish academic science, see P. Hubner, *Zwierciadło nauki. Mała encyklopedia polskiej nauki akademickiej* (Kraków, 2013), pp. 706–25.

⁷ This is verbalised by Smużewska.

⁸ Dziechciarz, Godula, *Organizacja i funkcjonowanie*, p. 7.

⁹ M. Smużewska, 'Studencki ruch naukowy w polskich uniwersytetach z perspektywy zmian zachodzących we współczesnym szkolnictwie wyższym', *Nauka i Szkolnictwo Wyższe*, vol. 45, no. 1 (2015), pp. 216–17; ead., 'Zorganizowane formy aktywności', pp. 192–96.

¹⁰ R. Stemplowski, *Zrzeszenie Studentów Polskich w socjalizmie państwowym 1950–1973* (Warszawa, 2018), pp. 40–42.

¹¹ A. Dereń, J. Skonieczny, 'Rola władzy w organizacji sieciowej', *Zarządzanie Publiczne*, vol. 44, no. 4 (2018), pp. 481–93 (at pp. 482–86).

transformation. The focus is limited to three issues often discussed at the national level: establishing a nationwide organisation and joint publication efforts, influencing the history curriculum, and promoting internationalisation. Other challenges were addressed locally, with clubs often working independently outside the movement's framework.¹² Finally, the article examines why these collaborative efforts ultimately failed.

The timeframe of this text does not align with those typically associated with Poland's political transformation but is instead specific to the subject matter. It spans the period between the Congress of Clubs in Krakow (December 1988) and the *sejmik* (assembly) of clubs held during the General Congress of Polish Historians (Powszechny Zjazd Historyków Polskich, PZHP) in Wrocław. The significance of these events will be detailed in subsequent sections. It is evident, however, that the program of changes first outlined in Krakow was ultimately abandoned by the late 1990s. The events surrounding the organisation of the *sejmik* underscore this, marking the last attempt of its kind.

A significant challenge in researching the student scientific movement lies in the fragmented source base. Document preservation within individual club archives varies significantly, depending on the diligence of their boards and the organisation's archival practices. As was done here, this challenge can be mitigated by drawing on materials from multiple clubs.¹³ Key sources included archives from clubs in Krakow and Warsaw, supplemented by materials from the Association of Student Scientific Circles of Historians housed in the Archive of the District Court of Kraków-Śródmieście. Documents from the ISHA archive in Leuven, the organisation's bulletin *ISHANews*, and articles and reports from the student press were also utilised. Debates published in the Wrocław student journal *Szewska Pasja* further illuminated the perspectives of students from that period.

Timeline of the History Student Scientific Movement Before 1989

The first history student clubs were established in the late 19th century at universities in Austrian Galicia (Krakow and Lviv). However, efforts to establish contact began only after Poland regained independence and new

¹² The student scientific movement has primarily been analysed through case studies. An important exception for the post-1989 period is Smużewska's 'Studencki ruch naukowy'. Additionally, the transformation of Polish higher education has been widely studied, with Dominik Antonowicz's book *Miedzy silą globalnych procesów a lokalną tradycją. Polskie szkolnictwo wyższe w dobie przemian* (Toruń, 2015) offering a comprehensive introduction to the topic.

¹³ Materials are either retained by the clubs themselves or transferred to university archives; however, there is a lack of standardised regulations.

clubs were founded at emerging universities.¹⁴ These culminated in a congress held in Warsaw on 1–3 November 1924, where the Association of History Students' Clubs of Polish Universities (Ogólnopolski Związek Kół Naukowych Historyków Studentów Uniwersytetów RP) was founded.¹⁵ Annual congresses followed, providing a platform for discussions on individual club activities and potential collaboration. From 1930, the organisation also published a yearbook.¹⁶ During the interwar period, these clubs prioritised scientific development, mutual support, and social engagement.¹⁷

This model largely persisted after the Second World War. However, reforms in 1949–1950 centralised the student scientific movement, restructuring clubs into organisations that supported university research and prepared students for independent academic work within a Marxist-Leninist framework. Soviet models directly influenced these changes.¹⁸ This period's only measurable nationwide impact was the Young Historians' Congress (Zjazd Młodych Historyków), organised in late November 1954 by the University of Warsaw's club, led by Bronisław Geremek.¹⁹ Although intended to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the People's Republic of Poland (PRL),²⁰ the event deserves attention for being the first time history students were able to present research conducted through science clubs. While the papers were considered mediocre, the fact that students engaged in independent research was unprecedented.²¹

The political thaw of 1956 marked a new phase for the student scientific movement. Science clubs that had been inactive during the Stalinist period due to a lack of members resumed operations, and new clubs were established.

¹⁴ P. Budzyński, 'Międzyuczelniana współpraca studenckich kół naukowych historyków (1921–1969) – zarys problematyki', in: *Studia z historii gospodarczej, kulturowej i społecznej*, Series: Vade Nobiscum, vol. 21 (Łódź, 2019), pp. 143–59 (at pp. 143–44).

¹⁵ M. Szulkin, 'Cele i działalność Związku Kół Historyków Studentów Uniw. Rzplitej Polskiej', *Biuletyn Związku Kół Historyków Studentów Uniwersytetów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, vol. 1 (1930), p. 9. Between 1931 and 1933, the association was replaced by the Division of History Clubs under the General Polish Association of Polish Academic Youth, which was later dissolved following the enactment of new higher education legislation.

¹⁶ Since 1931 under the title *Historja* (History).

¹⁷ E.g., W. Bayer, 'Koło naukowe dziś i jutro', *Historja*, vol. 1 (1931), p. 3.

¹⁸ J. Ładosz, *Referat wygłoszony na Kongresie Studentów Polskich w dniu 16 kwietnia 1950 r. przez przewodniczącego Rady Nacz. FPOS kol. Ładosza J.* (Warszawa, 1950), p. 39; T. Manteuffel, 'Studenckie koło naukowe', *Życie Nauki*, no. 5 (1952), pp. 47–50.

¹⁹ Archiwum Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu (Archive of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń) (hereinafter: AUMK), Koło Historyków (hereinafter: KH) 13, Correspondence regarding the congress, 1954.

²⁰ AUMK, Stowarzyszenie Kół Naukowych Historyków Studentów (hereinafter: SKNHS) 13, Information on the Young Historians' Congress, October 1953.

²¹ K. Kersten, 'Sesja młodych historyków', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, vol. 62, no. 2 (1955), pp. 256–59; M. Hoszowska, *Praktyka nauczania historii w Polsce 1944–1956* (Rzeszów, 2002), pp. 153–54.

By 1959, there were 240 clubs, most formed through bottom-up initiatives.²² The Association of Polish Students (*Zrzeszenie Studentów Polskich*, ZSP) began providing financial support while academic authorities oversaw substantive matters.²³ History students exemplified this dynamic. On 25 April 1959, the Coordination Committee of History Students' Science Clubs (*Komitet Koordynacyjny Studenckich Kół Naukowych Historyków*) was established in Toruń after 18 months of efforts to re-establish connections. While student-led, the Committee was integrated into the ZSP and affiliated with the Science Committee of its Chief Council (*Komisja Nauki Rady Naczelnej*, ZSP).²⁴

The Committee, comprising representatives from all history student clubs, had two leading roles: serving as a forum to address issues and mediating the distribution of funds provided by the ZSP. The approval for students to conduct independent research led to the emergence of student scientific conferences in the early 1960s. These events were supervised by academic staff, who evaluated submissions, participated in discussions, and awarded prizes for the best presentations.²⁵ Generous funding covered organisational costs and allowed for substantial financial prizes. Initially, only a few conferences were held annually, often coinciding with committee meetings, which ensured high efficiency. Similar conferences were organised for all humanities clubs, though historians were the most active participants.²⁶

By 1968, the autonomy of the Coordination Committee had visibly diminished as it came under stricter control from the ZSP Chief Council. In 1971, the Committee ceased operations independently,²⁷ and financial matters were delegated to individual universities. Student clubs increasingly organised conferences, though a growing rift emerged between students and professors, who gradually reduced their participation. Meanwhile, summer research camps gained popularity, with historical themes often focusing on the Second World War resistance movement and Old Polish epigraphy.²⁸

²² M. Masłowski, 'Koła naukowe w końcu lat pięćdziesiątych', *Problemy Studenckiego Ruchu Naukowego*, vol. 6, no. 2–3 (24–25) (1976), p. 113.

²³ Cf. M. Smużewska, 'The Polish student movement after the fall of the Iron Curtain: An organisational perspective', *International Review of Social Research*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2018), p. 16. On the role of the Polish Students' Association in the political system of the People's Republic of Poland, see Stemplowski, *Zrzeszenie Studentów Polskich*, *passim*.

²⁴ Budzyński, 'Międzyuczelniana współpraca', pp. 154–57; Dziechciarz, Godula, *Organizacja i funkcjonowanie*, pp. 129–32.

²⁵ For instance, Archiwum Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego (Archive of the Catholic University of Lublin) (hereinafter: AKUL), SKNH, Conferences, scientific meetings, events 1958–1996, minutes of the conference 'Freedom, peace, tolerance in the thousand years of Poland's history', 25 Feb. 1965.

²⁶ Budzyński, 'Międzyuczelniana współpraca', pp. 154–57; Dziechciarz, Godula, *Organizacja i funkcjonowanie*, pp. 129–32.

²⁷ AKUL, SKNH, Outside correspondence – public institutions 1968–1999, Letter of the Chairman of the Committee, 22 Jan. 1971.

²⁸ Cf. Budzyński, 'Studenckie Koło Naukowe Historyków'.

In 1973, the monopolistic Socialist Union of Polish Students (Socjalistyczny Związek Studentów Polskich, SZSP) was established, incorporating all science clubs except for those at the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL), where the local club remained outside its structure.²⁹ Within SZSP, two attempts to reactivate the Coordination Committee failed. Imposed from above, the initiative neither met students' needs nor introduced a compelling new concept, rendering it ineffective.³⁰ It appeared to serve primarily as a tool for SZSP oversight and reporting, with informal student contacts playing a more significant role.

A major shift occurred in 1980 with the rise of the *Solidarność* movement. Favourable conditions prompted a mass withdrawal of history clubs from SZSP, with roughly one-third of the 19 existing clubs leaving.³¹ There were plans to establish an independent association for formal cooperation, but these efforts were halted by the imposition of martial law on 13 December 1981.³² Martial law led to the dissolution of all student organisations, which were not re-registered until 1982. Although clubs continued their routine activities, broader initiatives were abandoned. Throughout the remainder of the 1980s, most contacts between history clubs remained informal, with only a few still affiliated with ZSP. By 1980, it can be said that the history student scientific movement primarily operated informally.

Starting Point: Identifying the Challenges

The transformations in Polish higher education after the fall of communism can be categorised into two groups. First, they marked the end of the authoritarian system and the restoration of values such as freedom of speech and the press, freedom of assembly, political pluralism, open borders, academic freedom, and university autonomy. Second, significant structural changes occurred within higher education itself. The introduction of a free market led to the rise of marketisation: students became clients, and private higher

²⁹ J. Krupski, 'Wspomnienie', in: *Księga Jubileuszowa 90-lecia Koła Naukowego Historyków Studentów KUL*, ed. by B. Proc, A. Gładysz, and J. Pożarowski (Lublin, 2009), pp. 59–66.

³⁰ For instance, Archiwum Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego (Jagiellonian University Archive) (hereinafter: AUJ), 0 KH-II 13, Committee session memo, 17 May 1980.

³¹ L. Kozieł, 'Historia Koła Naukowego Historyków UJ w latach 1980–1990', in: *Dzieje Koła Naukowego Historyków Studentów Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w latach 1892–1992. Wspomnienia seniorów*, ed. by K. Baczkowski (Kraków, 1992), p. 61; W. Rawski, 'Opolskie spotkanie młodych historyków', *Problemy Studenckiego Ruchu Naukowego*, vol. 32–34 (1977), p. 63.

³² AKUL, SKNH, Outside correspondence – public institutions 1968–1999, Letter of KH UW to other science clubs, 8 Nov. 1980.

education expanded rapidly.³³ Students at private institutions were largely uninvolved in the student scientific movement and were not permitted to participate in public university projects until 2000.³⁴

The challenges faced by the student scientific movement can similarly be divided into two groups. The first involves leveraging new opportunities to achieve goals previously deemed unattainable under the communist regime, such as forming a national association of clubs and publishing their own periodicals. The second group comprises challenges related to adapting to the new reality, including influencing curricula, countering the effects of massification (which weakened ties with academic staff), and addressing the marketisation of education, which led to decreased interest in social activities.

Between these two categories lies the internationalisation issue – both a long-held aspiration of many generations of Polish students and a necessity for aligning with the increasingly internationalised academic environment.³⁵

Challenges

Creating a Nationwide Organisation

Although the idea of a national association of student clubs emerged in 1980, it remained unfeasible until the end of the decade. The initiative was eventually taken by the Jagiellonian University (UJ) student club, whose members were involved in various opposition activities. From the beginning of the academic year 1988/89, they boycotted political economy and political science classes and submitted their own curriculum proposals. In a resolution from a general assembly on 13 October 1988, they emphasised that ‘the matter of the so-called political and social classes cannot obscure the need for radical reform of the entire system of science and higher education in Poland’.³⁶ Their effort to organise a congress of clubs in Krakow (14–15 December 1988) can be seen as an attempt to create a unified front. The congress had a distinctly practical character, focusing on the reform of teaching programs and strengthening cooperation.³⁷

³³ D. Antonowicz, R. Pinheiro, and M. Smużewska, ‘The changing role of students’ representation in Poland: An historical appraisal’, *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2014), pp. 470–84 (at p. 470).

³⁴ A. Stasiak, ‘VIII Ogólnopolski Zjazd Historyków Studentów – Lublin, 2000’, *Sandomiria*, no. 3 (2000), p. 113.

³⁵ Although many argue that, for historical science in particular, the turn was marked more by a closing off to internationalism, see e.g. H.-J. Bömelburg, ‘[Odpowiedź na ankietę]’, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, vol. 128, no. 1 (2021), pp. 35–36.

³⁶ Kozieł, ‘Historia Koła Naukowego’, p. 72.

³⁷ Archiwum Koła Historyków UJ (Archives of the UJ History Student Science Club) (hereinafter: AKHUJ), Various materials, Congress report, 15 Nov. 1988, no pagination.

Representatives from six clubs, roughly a quarter of all clubs at the time, attended the congress. Due to the absence of delegates from Warsaw and Poznań, the main contributions, aside from those of the hosts, came from KUL representatives. Despite limited attendance, a comprehensive action plan was formulated to enable the free flow of information. It was agreed that biannual congresses would combine working meetings with scientific conferences.³⁸ In the long term, a national association was envisioned, tasked with publishing a national periodical and influencing curriculum development and university policies.³⁹

A subsequent congress organised by the KUL club (25–28 April 1989) fully implemented the objectives set in Krakow. The four-day program included a scientific conference, discussions on curricula, and plans to establish a national association. However, the association was never formed. Due to limited sources, it is unclear whether the project was abandoned or merely postponed. The latter seems more likely, with legal issues likely posing the main obstacle.⁴⁰

It initially seemed that there was no urgency. In Lublin, it was agreed that the next meeting would occur five months later during the 14th PZHP in Łódź. However, the proposal by Professor Wojciech Wrzesiński was disregarded by the organisers. Without an organisation to formally submit or coordinate such a proposal and without any club willing to take independent initiative, the efforts initiated in Krakow dwindled within a year.⁴¹ Fundamental issues began to surface, including unreliable communication channels, low engagement from student clubs, inflexibility, and challenges in responding to unforeseen events.

Soon after, the Jagiellonian University (UJ) club proposed a new proposal. Piotr Rabiej organised the First General National Congress of Polish History Students (Ogólnopolski Zjazd Historyków Studentów, OZHS). The congress's name was a nod to the interwar terminology, with further historical references during the opening lectures.⁴² Despite this, the congress focused on contemporary issues, including club activities, potential collaboration, and curricula. Attendance doubled compared to previous congresses, with 13 clubs participating.⁴³ Unlike earlier attempts, the UJ club took full responsibility

³⁸ Indeed, in the UJ Club Archives, a number of messages of this sort dating back to the early 1990s can be found.

³⁹ AKHUI, Various materials, Congress report, 15 Nov. 1988, no pagination.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Convention program, 10 Apr. 1989, no pagination.

⁴¹ Though, in truth, in 1992, the club in Wrocław planned to organise another convention, this plan has never left the confines of the university. Archiwum Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego (Archive of the University of Wrocław) (hereinafter: AUWr), Youth Section SM-535, The science club work program and expected spending plan for the year 1992, p. 144.

⁴² AKHUI, various materials, Program of the First General National Congress of Polish History Students, April 1992.

⁴³ Ibid.

for advancing the association and completing the task swiftly. On 2 May 1992, another delegates meeting took place, attended by representatives from only four universities; however, support for the initiative was broader. The attendees adopted the by-laws Piotr Rabiej and Andrzej Marzec developed and elected the first management board. Further progress was delayed due to lengthy registration proceedings before the Krakow court, and the first general meeting did not occur until 28 November when Piotr Rabiej was elected as the first chairperson of the Association of History Student Clubs (Stowarzyszenie Kół Naukowych Historyków Studentów, SKNHS).⁴⁴

Although the by-laws envisioned broad participation from all clubs in the organisation's management and emphasised the role of the management board, in practice, the responsibility primarily fell to the chairperson. The management board, composed of representatives from all participating clubs, faced significant challenges: 1) effective work in such a large group proved impossible; 2) board membership was often viewed as purely honorary; and 3) the intended monthly praesidium meetings to handle current affairs could not be realised. Consequently, most responsibilities fell on the chairperson, who lacked the mandate to make decisions independently.⁴⁵

Alongside Piotr Rabiej, the leadership role was also held by Maciej Wilamowski (UJ) and Magdalena Kołodziej-Bylinowicz (University of Wrocław, UWr), each with a distinct vision for the organisation. Rabiej's tenure was particularly notable for two projects that had the potential to significantly benefit the entire history student scientific movement, though they ultimately fell short.

The first project was the incorporation of SKNHS into the Polish Youth Council (Polska Rada Młodzieży, PRM) on 19 December 1993.⁴⁶ Founded in 1991, the PRM brought together dozens of organisations to represent youth interests before the government and on an international level. However, the PRM played a marginal role in the Polish political system. Controversies arose from the outset, as membership required the settlement of assets used during the People's Republic of Poland, effectively excluding organisations established before 1989. Consequently, in 1998, the PRM lost its status as an observer at the European Youth Forum and ceased its activities.⁴⁷

The project of a national journal achieved greater – though short-lived – success. Under the People's Republic of Poland, censorship and restricted

⁴⁴ Ibid., Minutes of the general meeting of SKNHS, 28 Nov. 1992.

⁴⁵ Archiwum Sądu Rejonowego dla Krakowa-Śródmieścia w Krakowie (Archives of the District Court Kraków Śródmieście in Kraków) (hereinafter: ASRKr-Śr), 11th Division, KR.XI Ns-Rej. KRS 6144/01/418, Association by-laws.

⁴⁶ AKHUIJ, Letter by the general secretary of PRM, 10 Dec. 1993.

⁴⁷ 'My młodzi, komuna nam wciąż szkodzi', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27 May 1991; M. Konieczny, 'Polityka młodzieżowa w Polsce – podstawowe zagadnienia', in: *Polityka młodzieżowa w Polsce. Encyklopedia Komisji Europejskiej Youth Wiki*, ed. by M. Jeżowski, J. Dąbrowska-Resiak, vol. 1 (Warszawa, 2019), p. 16.

access to printing made it impossible for individual clubs to publish their own periodicals.⁴⁸ After 1989, these restrictions were lifted, resulting in numerous, though often ephemeral, publishing projects. The journal issued by SKNHS sought to fill this gap with a strictly academic focus. Despite minimal competition, generating sufficient content proved challenging, much like the annual contest organised by the UW club.⁴⁹ Ultimately, two issues were published by 1997. The journal was then taken over by *Societas Vistulana*, formed by young scholars from Warsaw, Krakow, and Gdańsk. Although the society soon shifted away from publishing history-related content for similar reasons, it became a respected publisher of academic works.⁵⁰

Magdalena Kołodziej, the third chairperson of SKNHS, was the only one not from UJ. As a former chairperson of the UW club, she had several national and international achievements, which she emphasised during her campaign.⁵¹ She first ran for the position in 1995, but the general meeting of SKNHS elected Wilamowski as chair, leaving Kołodziej as his deputy.⁵²

Kołodziej believed that the efficient functioning of the Association required structural reform.⁵³ This issue was addressed during a praesidium meeting on 18 December 1996, where two proposals were presented. The first proposed reducing the management board to five members, while the second, developed by the praesidium, suggested improvements while retaining the existing structure.⁵⁴ Despite calling on clubs to discuss both options, Kołodziej received minimal response.⁵⁵ Following this failure, her enthusiasm for reforming SKNHS seemed to wane.

The next opportunity to unite science clubs in a joint project came at the student assembly during the 16th PZHP in Wrocław. Arranged every five years by the Polish History Society, PZHP were significant events.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Cf. AKUL, SKNH, Outside correspondence – public institutions 1968–1999, Reply to the motion on document registration.

⁴⁹ AKHUJ, Various materials, documents of the 'Historia' editorial office.

⁵⁰ ASRKR-Śr, 11th Division, KR.XI Ns-Rej. KRS 6144/01/418, Minutes of general meeting, 9 Dec. 1996.

⁵¹ AKHUJ, Various materials, electoral leaflet of M. Kołodziej, December 1996.

⁵² A. Kusiak, M. Możdzonek, 'Sprawozdanie z Ogólnopolskiego Zjazdu Historyków Studentów RP, Wrocław 1994', *Nasze Historie*, vol. 2 (1995), p. 109; AUWr, Youth Section SM-5350, Report from the organisation and proceedings of the 3rd General National Convention of Polish History Students, Wrocław, 6–9 Dec. 1994, p. 75.

⁵³ M. Kołodziej, 'Jesteśmy potęgą', *Szewska Pasja*, vol. 23 (1996), p. 23.

⁵⁴ Archiwum Koła Historyków UW (Archives of the UW History Student Science Club) (hereinafter: AKHUW), 1996/7, Kołodziej's letter to the SKNHS members, 27 Dec. 1996; ASRKR-Śr, 11th Division, KR.XI Ns-Rej. KRS 6144/01/418, Minutes of general meeting, 9 Dec. 1996.

⁵⁵ AKHUW, 1996/7, Kołodziej's letter to the SKNHS members, 27 Dec. 1996.

⁵⁶ T. Rutkowski, 'Miejsce Instytutu Historii Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego w polskiej nauce historycznej (1945–1989)', *Przegląd Nauk Historycznych*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2019), p. 170.

The last time science clubs had organised a meeting during a Congress was in 1948.⁵⁷

The organisers granted the clubs considerable autonomy, stating that the convention 'must be organised by clubs themselves. If students fail to organise it, there will be no convention'.⁵⁸ This was seen as a litmus test for the entire network. Kołodziej and Professor Marcin Kula (UW) were tasked with organising the event, with early involvement from Dominika Zielińska, chairperson of the UW club. Zielińska's role was notable due to her close contact with Kula and her responsibility for organising OZHS, which required frequent correspondence with the SKNHS chairperson.

Work began in early 1998, but issues soon arose in January and February due to a lack of response from Kołodziej to several letters. Likely, the letters were lost at the university and never reached her. From that point, the tone of correspondence became less cordial, with minimal interest from most clubs.⁵⁹

Exerting Influence on Curricula

History student clubs have aspired to influence the history curriculum since the 1930s.⁶⁰ The first attempt was made in 1930 by the Association of Historians' Clubs, seeking to address the master's examination system introduced a few years earlier.⁶¹ Despite these efforts, decision-makers largely ignored the students' input.⁶² It is doubtful that the students who renewed these efforts in the 1990s were aware of this precedent.

The climate in the 1990s was conducive to such initiatives, as students, professors, and state authorities all agreed on the need for change. The first major step was to remove the so-called political subjects from the curriculum – an issue previously raised, notably during the 1981 student strikes.⁶³ The topic was further discussed at the 1989 congress in Lublin, where the student scientific movement advocated for reforms such as 'introducing unrestricted freedom in subject selection, significantly expanding the list of

⁵⁷ Budzyński, 'Międzyuczelniana współpraca', p. 151.

⁵⁸ AKHUW, Kula's letter to Kołodziej, 6 Feb. 1998.

⁵⁹ AKHUW, Correspondence between Kula, Zielińska, and Kołodziej, 1989.

⁶⁰ AUJ, OKH II 8. Invitation to a discussion about studies, 15 Dec. 1965.

⁶¹ M. Handelsman, ***, *Biuletyn Związku Kół Historyków Studentów Uniwersytetów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, vol. 1 (1930), p. 3.

⁶² J. Bieniasz, 'Parę uwag o egzaminach magisterskich', *Historja*, vol. 1 (1931); Stemplowski, *Zrzeszenie Studentów Polskich*, pp. 159–60; AKUL, SKNH, External communication – public institutions 1947–1967, Letter of the vice-chairman of the Coordination Committee on improving historical studies, 1 Feb. 1960.

⁶³ K. Lesiakowski, *Łódzki strajk studencki styczeń–luty 1981. Spojrzenie po latach* (Łódź–Warszawa, 2014), pp. 23–24, 36–37.

subjects, and reforming the curriculum'.⁶⁴ A resolution was also passed stating that 'one of the roles of Student Clubs should be influencing curriculum content and university course structure'.⁶⁵

This posed challenges: developing a coherent plan, attracting decision-makers' attention, and pushing the proposal through. Comprehensive plans were first drafted at the 1988–1989 congresses, with UJ tasked with the general draft, the Teacher College in Krakow (Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna, WSP) focusing on teaching studies, and UMK preparing one for archivists.⁶⁶ These drafts were intended as a basis for discussions with the Ministry of National Education (MEN) and university rectors.⁶⁷ However, no binding decisions were made, and Wrzesiński suggested continuing the debate at the PZHP in Łódź.⁶⁸

A survey was devised by the University of Łódź club to gather input and to be sent to all science clubs. Although largely unsuccessful, the survey's responses were intended to serve as a starting point for further discussion.⁶⁹ Despite Wrzesiński's commitment, student issues were not addressed at the Łódź congress, likely due to its timing at the beginning of democratic Poland. The program had no space for new problems arising from the changing political landscape.⁷⁰ While students could have organised their own meetings, they likely lacked the determination, particularly given the poor state of the Łódź club at the time.

The subsequent course of events suggests that the Krakow club was the primary driver of curriculum-related actions, likely due to its active involvement in altering the curriculum at its university. The discussion on curricula re-emerged during the 1st OZHS,⁷¹ but the organisers of the following meetings in Gdańsk, Wrocław, and Warsaw did not address the topic. It resurfaced again at the 5th Congress, once more organised in Krakow.⁷²

While the discussion did not yield concrete conclusions, it left an impression on Magdalena Kołodziej. Upon taking over leadership of SKNHS, she aimed to have students develop and propose their own curriculum, although it was

⁶⁴ AKHUJ, Various materials, Congress report, 15 Nov. 1988.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Congress program, 10 Apr. 1989.

⁶⁸ L. Kozieł, 'Historia Koła Naukowego', pp. 72–73.

⁶⁹ Archiwum Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego (Archive of the Warsaw University), SKNH, Arch 24, Survey, 1989.

⁷⁰ Cf. A. Stępnia, 'Problematyka dydaktyczno-historyczna na Powszechnych Zjazdach Historyków Polskich (1880–2019)', *Klio Polska. Studia i Materiały z Dziejów Historiografii Polskiej*, vol. 12 (2020), pp. 197–232 (at p. 215); Rutkowski, 'Miejsce Instytutu', pp. 189–90.

⁷¹ AKHUJ, various materials, 1st OZHS program, 1992.

⁷² Archiwum Uniwersytetu Marii Curie Skłodowskiej (Archive of the Maria Curie Skłodowska University), KN 46, Invitation for SKNHS general assembly, 20 Nov. 1996.

not her primary objective.⁷³ Another discussion on this topic occurred at the OZHS in Toruń following Wrzesiński's proposal from Lublin. Had this initiative been successful, it might have gained broader recognition among professors.

In her correspondence with Prof. Kula, Kołodziej outlined her vision for a convention, suggesting that the 'second meeting could be dedicated to discussing curricula in specific institutions and the 'ideal curriculum' that would maximally stimulate students'.⁷⁴ Of the Kołodziej-Zielińska-Kula trio, Kołodziej was the most enthusiastic about including this topic. While Kula refrained from intervening in student decisions, Zielińska expressed scepticism, proposing instead a discussion on historical methodology, myths, and schools of thought to establish theoretical foundations for reform.⁷⁵ Kołodziej countered by emphasising the students' interest in curriculum development based on past experiences and pragmatism.⁷⁶ Ultimately, the debate became irrelevant, and after 1999, clubs ceased attempting to influence curricula, effectively abandoning the issue.⁷⁷

Although the 1990s was a diverse decade, expectations among club representatives regarding reform remained surprisingly consistent. However, these ideas were not necessarily representative of the broader student population. Club activists, particularly those in leadership roles, often stood out from their peers due to their broader aspirations and resistance to a study system that resembled traditional schooling.⁷⁸

Indeed, students advocated for a system similar to the Humboldtian model, emphasising greater academic freedom and more choice in courses. They stressed the importance of engaging students in research and focusing more on written term papers to promote independent intellectual development.⁷⁹ A particular concern was the weakened relationship between students and professors, attributed mainly to the increasing number of students.⁸⁰ Although limiting student numbers was not explicitly suggested, there was a call to shift focus towards more research opportunities, examination changes, and reducing ineffective classes in favour of those who developed practical historical skills.⁸¹

⁷³ AKHUJ, Various materials, M. Kołodziej's electoral leaflet, December 1996. M. Kołodziej, 'Co dalej, czyli o perspektywach ruchu studenckiego w naszym Instytucie i nie tylko', *Szewska Pasja*, vol. 1 (1997), p. 18.

⁷⁴ AKHUW, Kołodziej's letter to Kula, 2 Feb. 1998.

⁷⁵ AKHUW, Zielińska's letter to Kołodziej, 16 Apr. 1998.

⁷⁶ AKHUW, Kołodziej's letter to Zielińska, April 1998.

⁷⁷ B. Cichocki, 'Nieobiektywna relacja z XVI Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich we Wrocławiu (15–18 Września 1999)', *Teka Historyka*, vol. 15 (1999), p. 129.

⁷⁸ M. Kołodziej, 'Co dalej, czyli o perspektywach ruchu studenckiego w naszym Instytucie i nie tylko', *Szewska Pasja*, vol. 1 (1997), p. 18.

⁷⁹ Ł. Kamiński, 'Pytania i odpowiedzi', *Szewska Pasja*, vol. 3 (1996), p. 18.

⁸⁰ A., 'Fin de siècle', *Szewska Pasja*, vol. 3 (1996), p. 17.

⁸¹ Cichocki, 'Nieobiektywna relacja', pp. 127–29; Kołodziej, 'Co dalej', p. 18.

Interestingly, despite the rising importance of labour market relevance, the focus remained on refining the skills of a historian rather than broader employability. This vision primarily catered to the most talented students – particularly active club members. It did not appeal to most students or the academic staff, who, earning modest salaries, were often seeking additional employment opportunities. Reportedly, the proposed changes had the most support from young academic staff – former club members – whose own experiences underscored the need for reform.⁸²

In summary, although there was broad agreement on the direction for history course reforms, the proposals never moved beyond initial conceptualisation. Despite multiple attempts, these initiatives were more a subject of informal discussion rather than concrete actions. The proposed changes primarily aimed to reintroduce the Humboldtian model, focusing on the interests of the most skilled students while disregarding the realities of a free-market economy. Thus, even if these ideas had been fully developed and formally presented, they likely would not have gained the approval of university authorities.

Internationalisation

The 1990s saw significant growth in various forms of club activity related to internationalisation. This text focuses on two key aspects: maintaining bilateral cooperation with foreign universities and participation in ISHA as promising avenues.

On 19 November 1988, the Hungarian Association of History Students (Magyar Történezhallgatók Egyesülete, MTE) was founded in Szeged, Hungary.⁸³ During discussions with colleagues from Austria and France, the concept of a federation uniting history student organisations from various countries emerged. This idea was further elaborated at the 'Revolution and History' Conference in Budapest in October 1989, attended by participants from seven countries, including Poland.⁸⁴ The idea received support, and a preliminary declaration of intent was signed. On 9 May 1990, the International Students of History Association (ISHA) was officially established at a subsequent meeting in Budapest.⁸⁵

⁸² A., 'Przywilej ostatniego słowa', *Szewska Pasja*, vol. 6 (1996), p. 18; O., 'Z drugiej strony', *Szewska Pasja*, vol. 4–5 (1996), pp. 20–21.

⁸³ A. Barna, 'Magyar Történezhallgatók Egyesületének krónikája', *Sic itur ad astra*, vol. 2–4 (1989), p. 115.

⁸⁴ International Students of History Association Archive (hereinafter: ISHAA), IS 141, Declaration of will, November 1998; 'MTE's road from its birth to the foundation of an International Association of History Students', in: *The Europe-Paradigm*, conference program.

⁸⁵ 'Young Historians for a New Europe', ISHAA, IS 141, Conference program, [May 1990].

Polish clubs involved in ISHA can be divided into two categories: those that participated in events organised by others (primarily seminars) and those that made their own contributions. The first group includes the KUL club, the only Polish organisation represented at the founding conference, and other clubs whose members sporadically attended seminars from 1996 to 1999, including Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, WSP in Lublin, and Zielona Góra.⁸⁶ The second group features clubs from Gdańsk, Wrocław, and Warsaw. In 1993–1994, members of ISHA from Gdańsk collaborated with Mainz on a project examining Polish-German stereotypes, which was held up by ISHA leadership as a model of successful international cooperation.⁸⁷ They also organised a conference titled 'Multiculturalism in Europe'.

The Wrocław club became more active starting in 1994. Łukasz Kamiński, chairperson of the UWr club, participated in the ISHA project 'The History of Students Policy', comparing post-war student protests across Europe.⁸⁸ Additionally, Wrocław hosted several bilateral conferences with students from Hungary and the Netherlands, and Wrocław members regularly attended annual ISHA conferences in large numbers. Riding on this success, the Wrocław club hosted the yearly ISHA conference in 1997, attracting 250 participants and receiving positive feedback.⁸⁹ The UJ club also participated in ISHA in a limited but impactful manner, organising the ISHA Conference on the History of Europe in Oświęcim and Krakow from 23 February to 5 March 1992.⁹⁰

It is important to note that Polish participation in ISHA was highly selective. Except for the UWr club, the number of individuals involved from each centre was small, typically around three. This limited involvement was insufficient to significantly influence Polish historical studies or the broader student scientific movement. Moreover, ISHA's limited influence likely also resulted from its own struggles in establishing a strong position.⁹¹

⁸⁶ M. Wójciuk, 'Koło Naukowe Historyków Studentów UMCS w Lublinie (1953–2001). Działalność studenckiej organizacji naukowej na tle przemian społecznych i ustrojowych w Polsce', *Radzyński Rocznik Humanistyczny*, vol. 5 (2007), p. 212. As for Bydgoszcz, this meant sending applications for the conference in Helsinki. S. Saaritsa, 'On "Revolution?!"', *ISHANews*, vol. 29 (1998), p. 3; *ISHA Contact 1997–1998*, (Leuven, 1997), pp. 19–21.

⁸⁷ K. Fenyő, 'The ISHA Academic Programme', *ISHANews*, vol. 2 (1991), p. 6; ead., 'Report on an ISHA study trip in Hungary by Krisztina Fenyő or ISHA is not a Travel Agency', *ISHANews*, vol. 6 (1991), pp. 3–4; 'Ideas about ISHA seen by the new international secretariat 1993–1994', *ISHANews*, vol. 14 (1993), pp. 8, 10.

⁸⁸ ISHA IS 6, The History of Student Policy Project, n.d. [1994].

⁸⁹ '8th ISHA Conference 'Religion Throughout History'', *ISHANews* (1997), vol. 27, p. 6.

⁹⁰ 'ISHA Conference on the History of Europe', *ISHANews*, vol. 6 (1991), p. 7.

⁹¹ 'Editorial', *ISHANews*, vol. 27 (1997), p. 2.

Conclusion

In the early 1990s, the history student scientific movement operated as a network of informal connections. Systemic changes provided momentum to re-establish and strengthen these connections, leading to the idea of creating an association to coordinate activities. However, early attempts showed that achieving this was challenging, mainly due to the passivity of many science clubs toward the proposed changes. The founding of SKNHS in 1992 did little to change this.

The obstacle to reforming the history student scientific movement was not a lack of ideas but rather difficulties with cooperation. Projects often fail due to either the organisers' inefficiency or the passivity of other participants – usually a combination of both. A clear example is students' efforts to influence curriculum reform. Although this issue motivated the first congress in 1988 and resurfaced throughout the decade, no specific actions succeeded despite the consistency of club activists' expectations across universities. Thus, it is evident that, despite shared aspirations, history students were unable to take collective action. A major reason for this failure was the nature of the network itself, which hindered effective communication. Traditional mail-based relations did not provide the necessary level of coordination, and successful initiatives required in-person contact. This became evident when SKNHS was founded, as the association did not improve communication or alter the nature of these contacts. In this context, the 1988 concept of holding congresses every six months offered a more promising approach.

These events illustrate that willingness alone is insufficient to ensure success in a network organisation. Creating an efficient structure is essential. The case of ISHA shows that this problem was not unique to Polish history students. As a network of organisations across Europe, ISHA also faced similar challenges. The relatively greater success of organisations like the European Law Students' Association or the European Geography Association for Students and Young Geographers suggests that the nature of the field of study or the state of the discipline may have been crucial factors. However, resolving this question requires further comparative research.

Summary

The student scientific movement in Poland is not a well-researched topic, either locally or internationally. This is not due to its insignificance in Polish academic life but rather to a lack of appropriate methodological approaches and limited access to primary sources.

The author views the student scientific movement as a network organisation involving student clubs. This article analyses the functioning of such a network created by history students during the transformations of the 1990s.

The study indicates that history students within the student scientific movement struggled to adapt to the new socio-economic realities despite numerous reform proposals and efforts. The author identifies challenges in effective cooperation within the network as the primary cause of this failure.

Prawdziwe wyzwania, nieudane zmiany. Próby współpracy międzyuczelnianej w ramach ruchu naukowego studentów historii w Polsce w okresie transformacji, 1988–1999

Studencki ruch naukowy nie należy do najlepiej poznanych zagadnień. Nie wynika to jednak z jego niewielkiego znaczenia w polskim życiu akademickim a raczej jest efektem braku odpowiednich podstaw metodologicznych i problemów w dostępie do źródeł. Autor przyjmuje, że studencki ruch naukowy stanowi organizację sieciową w której uczestniczą poszczególne koła. Celem artykułu jest analiza funkcjonowania takiej struktury stworzonej przez studentów historii, w trakcie transformacji lat dziewięćdziesiątych XX w.

Przeprowadzane badania pozwalają na postawienie tezy, że mimo licznych pomysłów reformatorskich, studenci historii działający w ramach studenckiego ruchu naukowego, nie poradzi sobie z adaptacją do nowej rzeczywistości społeczno-gospodarczej. Jako najważniejszą przyczynę takiego stanu rzeczy autor wskazuje problem ze skuteczną współpracą w ramach sieci.

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