Research Article

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The Polish student movement after the fall of the Iron Curtain: An organisational perspective

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Abstract: This study analyses the student movement from an organizational perspective. It specifically studies the Polish case using the organizational perspective originating from the works and Meyer and Zald. With the use of this theoretical tool, together with an anthropological approach to organizations, the author aims to describe three main organizations of student movement, namely the ZSP, NZS and PSRP, as well as the movement's goals, resources, personnel, language and values. The comparison is made against the background of ongoing transformation. It is found that the situation of organizations has changed greatly, as has their position within the movement, and the components of each organization.

Keywords: student organisations, social movements, higher education, Poland

Introduction

Influential authors regard social movements as group action are Neil Smelser and Mancur Olson. According to them a social movement is a group action that is directed towards social change (Gilbert 2006, pp. 3–17; Olson 1965; Smelser 1965). Such group (collective) action may be understood as a configuration of organisational structures and strategies to empower the oppressed part of a given society. Although this definition is a bit excessive, it reflects the approach from 60. and 70. of previous century (Shannon & Glassberg 2011). Organisations can be seen instrumentally, as means of achieving mobilisation (Clemens & Minkoff 2004, pp. 155–177; Meyer & Zald 1977, pp. 1212–1234). While acknowledging that there are divergent perspectives on the topic (della Porta & Diani 2009; Goffman 1986; Offe 1985; Opp 2009; Snow, Soule & Kriesi 2004; Tilly 1978; Touraine 1977, 1981), I will keep to the afore-mentioned frame for the study of the Polish student movement after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Author is more interested in inner dynamics of the movement than its interactions with center of power. A political process approach towards student movement in Poland requires separate attention.

Each organisation (also the one created by students) has its own aims, personnel (members), resources (i.e. contacts, money, equipment, buildings, other material assets, its own language, values, symbols, and effects of its own intellectual work), and last but not least, its own form (understood as hierarchy or structure) (Kostera 2005). This form determines to a large extent the actual and possible outcomes of social movements. Each functional organisation is a source of identity and activism for its personnel - not only paid staff (those are fraction of a percent in student movement) but most of all volunteers and therefore for social movements (Melucci & Keane 1989). In this short text, it is not possible to examine thoroughly all those variables named, especially in each Polish student organisation that emerged between 1989 and 2018. Therefore, this research aims to provide only a general overview of the situation of the Polish student movement after 1989.

Currently, the student movement (SM) in Poland is a kind of collective action that is directed towards (some aspects of) social change in the higher education (HE) system. However, it lacks the strength of the general claims that it possessed before 1989; therefore, the political process approach (Kriesi 2004, pp. 67–91; Opp

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2009) is now less useful.[1] Student movements involve a certain organisational background and strategies of behaviour that are effective in allowing students to obtain their goals. European researchers tend to see them as homogenic countercultures. Americans, however, regard SMs as a coalition of neglected groups that have no voice at the campuses: at a certain point they can no longer accept the situation and they protest against the social order (della Porta & Diani 2009, p. 8). Significantly, the author believes that the Polish case mostly exhibits the organisational aspect of SM. Many Polish researchers describe SM through studying the history of particular organisations (path dependence). It seems obvious to them that social change would be impossible without the support of organisational structures: their personnel (members), resources, contacts, etc. They characterize protests and strikes as focusing primarily on organisational actors and their relations (see: Anusz 2000; Junes 2015; Skuza & Ulicki 2002; Walczak 1990). The Polish student movement has been created by student organisations – entities established by students and acting on behalf of that community. All of them wanted at some point to become official student representatives at universities and in relation to the authorities. Becoming a representative student organisation means access to resources, share in the university's governance and an impact on students.

There are no many spontaneous students' collective actions in Polish HE sector and they are incidental, local, short-lived, and subside easily.[2] They are often created on the internet and based on social media.[3] It is difficult to find subjects that bring together the entire student environment, as it is divided due to different problems and needs. However, there have been few exceptions: a protest against the Anti-Countefeiting Trade Agreement - ACTA (winter 2012), an initiative called 'Engaged University' (spring 2015), and a more recent (winter 2017) demonstration against the authority of the Law and Justice Party and its leader, Jarosław Kaczyński (see: Onet 2012; Wprost 2012; Mrowiec 2017; Junes 2017; Harłukowicz 2017).

The aim of this text is to describe Polish student movement from organisational perspective. The study spans period from 1989 till now. Organisational approach means in this case focus on three most influential student organisations (the key for selection were opinions of distinguished Polish researchers of the field). Those organisations are: the ZSP (Association of Polish Students), the NZS (Independent Students' Association) and PSRP (Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland). The text contains parts dedicated to methods, context (description of Polish HE system), analysis of key-organisations using selected variables and evaluation of potential of modern student movement in Poland and the role of described organisations inside it. It seems that the modern student movement in Poland has undergone changes that made it weaker and localized which also influenced the role of above-mentioned organisations.

Methods

This case study is an example of so-called interdisciplinary qualitative research, because the data and the topic itself can be interpreted as historical, political, moral and sociological at the same time (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, pp. 645–658). These aspects cannot be clearly separated, as they overlap each other. The material is drawn from scholarly contributions, press articles, memoirs, anniversary publications, archives, interviews with leaders of SM, and websites of organisations. The study spans the period from 1989 until the present. Only by using such diverse material can one try to describe the complexity of the subject. Complementary to other quantitative approaches (Ekiert & Kubik 1998, pp. 91–117), it would be preferable here to focus on revealing the actual roles of organisations and their relations, instead of a rigid presentation of dates, events, and repertoire of actions used during protests.[4]

The term 'student organisation' is understood to mean an organisation that brings students together for a certain purpose (work experience, professional services, share in governance, etc.). At a time of social unrest or

1 The political process approach or political opportunity theory focuses on the context of social movements. This context is usually understood as political opportunities created somewhere in the centre of power or in configurations of powers. Because the student movement in Poland does not seek radical changes in the political system, but is instead interested in modifying some aspects of HE, the author therefore prefers to use the organisational perspective. Nonetheless, author is aware that both perspectives are not antithetical.

2 This conclusion is based on a systematic study of press titles such as *Immunitet*, *Forum Akademickie*, the daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and internet websites and social media profiles of key student organisations: the PSRP, the NZS and the ZSP.

3 For instance: the protest before Prof. Zygmunt Bauman's lecture at the University of Gdansk (2013), against a beauty contest at NCU University (2016), and against changes in the Polish judicial system (2017). These events had their own Facebook pages, and the situation was discussed on various internet sites where the news was passed on.

4 This opinion is based on years of data collection in archives, libraries, during interviews and on the internet.

conflict, this may become what was previously called a 'social movement organisation': an element that supports the social movement.[5] However, not all organisations are a type of students' representatives in a university decision structure (in short: 'student representation') in the same sense. Although the term 'student representation' theoretically refers to all organisational entities that attract students, not all of them have the same influence on universities' governance or the political centres of power and last but not least on the students themselves. Among thousands of organisations,[6] the three most important in the current Polish SM are the PSRP (Student Parliament of Republic of Poland), ZSP (Association of Polish Students) and NZS (Independent Students' Association). Only the first one is a formal and central student representation according to HE Law (2005).

According to Altbach, 'most visible student organisations are activist political movements (...). However, there are many kinds of less dramatic student organisations ranging from cultural and social organisations (...) to student publications, newspapers and athletic groups' (Altbach 2007, p. 17). Particular organisational solutions may differ between the countries or even between particular HEIs but generally one can say (it is an extrapolation of Altbach's thought) that political activism, the one that shapes student culture and society as a whole, is either located in general youth organisations loosely connected to the university (those are more active at times of unrest) or in official organisations of student representatives that draw their strength from share in governance. The youth organisations are not in a focus of this text. An organisation of students' representatives requires comment as it has got multilevel structure and many functions that sometimes overlap or even conflict with each other. There are three main levels: international federations, national-level representation, and the level of particular universities. Their role is to represent students' interests and participate in the decision-making process at universities. The national level in each European country is mostly political, with the function of representing the interests of students and mediating with authorities. The university level is more focused on governance; it is also political, though in a local way, similarly to local self-government. Altbach notices that majority of student movements is about politics, only student services seems to be less politicized (Altbach 2007, p. 333-34). However, in Poland this thesis cannot be empirically verified. Student services are dependent on representations, they have limited resources, and are also embedded in social networks that lack transparency (relations between university, student representatives in university's decision structure, activists of student services and their beneficiaries – who, gets what, and why?). This is also politics. Nonetheless, Altbach's main merit is to provide a comparative theoretical understanding of student organisations, which had previously been somewhat lacking (Luescher-Mamashela 2015, p. 33).

The Polish HE system as an environment for the SM

The Polish HE system currently consists of 415 institutions: 19 of them are public universities, 23 are technical universities (polytechnics), and 14 are medical universities. The rest of public HEIs have got status of colleges or academies that usually have a set profile – linguistic, educative, economic, artistic, agricultural, technical, etc. More than half of higher education institutions (HEIs), specifically 283, are in private hands (GUS 2016, p. 236). They are also mostly colleges. The number of students in the academic year 2015/2016 was 1.4 million, with a gross enrollment rate of 37.3%. This is a multiple increase since 1990, when the indicator was 9.8% (GUS 2016, p. 28). The most numerous group are students from public universities, at 422,200, though this number has been dropping in recent years. Technical universities are still popular, with 301,400 students, and medical universities with 60,600 students. Since 2010/2011, the number of HEIs has continued to drop, particularly in the private sector. Experts predict that the private sector will substantially shrink until 2020, and cuts may also affect public education (Antonowicz & Gorlewski 2011). The majority of students are enrolled in public universities, forming 76.5% of the total. The proportion of students enrolled in private HEIs is now 23.5%, and is dropping; the decrease in relation to the previous year was above 8%. Almost one-third are first-year students who are studying part-time (GUS 2016, p. 28).

Polish HE is underfunded and often fails to meet market expectations (both in education and in R&D). Moreover, it is struggling with demographic diversity (aging society) and it is trying to catch up with the West (i.e. the

5 Organisations can be a result of a social movement; they can be an element of a social movement that enables actions; and finally, the social movement can be an element within the organisation (Clemens & Minkoff 2004, pp. 158–163).

6 According to estimations based on records of all public universities (19) and a sample of other HEIs (20), the number of registered organisations within the student movement is around 8,000, one-third of which are active. Data were cross-checked with another register, struna.edu.pl.

problem of internationalization, both in education and in R&D). The net of HEIs is too widely spread, the scientific staff are too numerous, and last but not least, there are too many graduates for market needs. In order to assure the quality of education, various instruments of competition and evaluation are being constantly introduced. Many studies have dealt with these issues (for instance: E&Y 2009; Kościelniak & Makowski 2012; Herbst & Rok 2014; Antonowicz 2015; Górniak 2015; Kwiek 2016a, 2016b). An important point here is that modern student organisations are operating in mass and in a diversified environment, and therefore it is difficult to meet (or even to hear) all student needs and expectations. Student claims are limited, particularistic and often conflicting. In private HEIs, students are clients, while at public universities the situation is less clear regarding agency. Different problems affect part-time and full-time students, students from well-established universities, and institutions with less ambitious educational goals. In this situation, to achieve fair representation of all students, a fundamental question must be asked: whom do student organisations actually represent, and what do they aim to accomplish?

The history of the SM in Poland is as old as that of universities, and dependent on their environment. Tom Junes noticed that student politics was central to Polish politics in the communist era, and to a certain extent it remains so today (Junes 2015). Poland indeed has a tradition of SM and various historical forms of organisations representing students that are deeply rooted in national history, dating back far earlier than the 20th century (Smużewska 2012, pp. 157–180). Before World War II, there were numerous organisations in existance. Moreover, the period of 1918–1939 was even called the 'Student Republic' (Pilch 1997), which shows that SM is not just a phenomenon from the 1960s, as some researchers seem to argue (Lipset 1993). The SM has revived numerous times, with the help of organisational support.

The HE system before 1989 was very different to the current one: it was centrally managed, less developed and diversified (with 90 public HEIs of all kinds, including one private Catholic university, and with less than 400,000 students), and it was politically controlled (MEN 1990). Students had their official representation, the ZSP (Association of Polish Students). When the system crashed, a new organisation was born: the NZS (Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów, Independent Students' Association). After the fall of the Iron Curtain, we observe the growing importance and recognition of a new entity, the PSRP (Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland). These three organisations will be described in the subsequent sections.

ZSP

The ZSP was established in 1950 as an 'umbrella organisation', a kind of trade union for numerous subordinated associations that organized culture, education, tourism, work experience, etc. It goal was to 'eliminate the multidirection in student life' (Statute of ZSP 1950). This was needed in order to take over the properties of prewar organisations, and to remove pluralism and autonomy from the student environment (Galus 1960, p. 18). The ZSP financed the activities of subordinated organisations (services); therefore, it had a direct influence on their performance. The ZSP had no formal share in the governance of universities, and its members had no formal votes in the senate or on the faculty board; but it was nevertheless recognized as a key actor in the HE sector. Activists were present at various university gatherings (Walczak 1990, p. 98). The ZSP was a contractor of the Party's plans, such as improving the efficiency rate of passing exams, increasing student engagement in supporting the work of state enterprises, or early involvement of students in a scientific career (Walczak 1990). Between 1948 and 1956, there was also a replica of Komsomolsk – a general youth union[7], just like in other Soviet countries, named the Polish Youth Union (ZMP), but its goals were focused on political education (Hillebrandt 1988, pp. 221–249).[8]

The ZSP survived all the political crises: namely those in 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980 and 1989. This is due to the fact that besides political management, the core of the organisation at the level of particular HEIs created personnel (members) who were convinced of the value and functionality of the 'umbrella organisation'. In other words, the organisation's two strengths appeared to be its achievements and its devoted personnel. During social unrest, the ZSP always took the side of the Party, although it was never vindictive nor criminal towards political

7 Komsomolsk – pl. Komsomoł, ros. Комсомол – abbreviation of Communist Youth Union that existed in Soviet Russia since 1918.

8 One of the ex-members of the ZMP recalls: 'all addressed each other as "comrade" – students to students, students to professors, professors to professors. From dusk to dawn all should be present at the university, so everyone could watch each other. All were focused on detecting the so-called "class enemy". When we didn't want to point to one, we said that the "class enemy" is inside all of us. Open self-criticism defended us against serious consequences of denunciation, which was very common at that time' (Kuroń 1990, p. 60).

opponents.[9]

Just before the political transformation, the ZSP had only a few thousand members,[10] probably less than 3,000. Resources were rich and varied, ranging from political contacts to student clubs, dormitories, hotels, summer resorts, travel offices, even cinemas and theatres. In the capital, it had few offices in the very heart of the city. At each HEI, it had a separate department that was subordinated to the Chief Council in Warsaw. The language of the activists imitated that of the Party, but the numerous ZSP-financed press titles (*Od Nowa*, *ITD*, *Student*, *Nowy Medyk*, *Politechnik*) were not equally politicized (Skuza & Ulicki 2002; Walczak 1990, pp. 235–249). As one of the communist activists said, 'ZSP was a school of citizenship (...), self-improvement and pragmatism. (...). ZSP was not an ideological fundamentalist. It maintained the moderation and possible distance, propagating solidarity among young leftist intelligentsia' (Interview with ex-activist, UW Warsaw).

After 1989, the ZSP lost its privileged status, many of its members, and most of its resources, except one: contacts (the role of former members). It experienced a short crisis in the early 1990s, but in 1993 it started to re-emerge. In the same year, it officially established a partnership with political party the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). Activists of the ZSP were invited to become party members, and some decided to do so. In 2001, the ZSP received additional support from ex-members who established an association called 'Ordynacka' (the name of the street where the association's offices are located). This 'Ordynacka' organisation brings together most of the influential political names of the early transformation and current politics, including a few prime ministers, and even a president of Poland, Aleksander Kwaśniewski (1995–2005). The official goal of the organisation is, among others, 'to support ZSP' (Ordynacka's Statute 2005).

The current activities of the ZSP cover many areas, such as representing the academic community, fighting for student rights, legal counselling, student culture, sport, tourism and student clubs. The association is especially concerned with equal access to the HE system, financial aid, and access to health care (Skuza & Ulicki 2002). The main (old?) goal of ZSP is to 'inspire the student community for actions that will benefit broader society' (Statute of ZSP 2014). However, the ZSP has no separate share in governance at any level. In comparison with the past, the ZSP's initiatives are now less spectacular, but they are consistent with leftist ideals, and are to some extent a logical consequence of its previous activities (though on a different scale). The ZSP supports demonstrations organized by the left-wing parties of the SLD (Democratic Left Alliance) and 'Razem' ('Together'). These parties are now in opposition; their joint support fails to exceed a few per cent, and thus the ZSP's participation in protests is rather limited and not compulsory among members. The structure of the organisation has remained almost unchanged: it consists of one chief council, several district councils and numerous university councils. Except for the depletion of resources and substantial loss of members, the organisation is essentially the same, making only minor adjustments to adopt to organisational pluralism. Nowadays the ZSP is one among many similar organisations and seems to ignore that fact. In author's opinion the ZSP fails to find new strategy to revive and gain new members, it is still living in its past instead. It doesn't offer any options for systemic change.

NZS

The Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów (NZS, Independent Students' Association) was registered in winter 1981, after the longest strike in Europe. It lasted 29 days, and 10,000 students were involved in the protest just in one city (Łódź), not to mention other academic centers where 'sit-ins' also took place (Kowalczyk 2000). The settlement with students concerned not only creating the NZS, but also the autonomy of universities and free access to knowledge (the abolition of prohibited texts in libraries – students didn't have access to them due to politically incorrect content). The agreement that students forced on authorities was significant, and could be treated as

9 In the Institute of National Remembrance (pl. *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej* – an archive that collects documents to prove crimes against Polish nation; including archives of communist political police), the author failed to find any records of the ZSP reporting anybody to political police only because a student refused to be its member. Of course, this does not prove that such events did not happen, but it certainly was not a common phenomenon.

10 Since the early 1980s, there has been formal student self-government in universities (an organisation of representatives that have share in a university's governance). This was introduced as a consequence of strikes organised by the anti-communist opposition in 1980. Before the new HE Law (1982), the ZSP functioned as 'a kind of 'self-government at universities. New self-governance was created from scratch in the form of independent entities. They had their share in the existing governance bodies of universities. The ZSP's members could take part in elections, just like activists from the other organisations. The ZSP would usually lose because students saw the elections as an opportunity to express their political views (Popińska & Popiński 2010: 250-253). Hence, university's self-government contributed to the decline of the ZSP as a mass organisation. Many members went to the political opposition, although the outflow of members began almost a decade earlier.

an indicator of the system's forthcoming erosion. The Ministry of Internal Affairs recognized the NZS as one of the ten reasons for introducing martial law a few months later (Acts of Institution of National Remembrance, IPN BU MSW II 362). At first, the organizers wanted NZS to be an 'element of the Solidarity movement' (Statute of NZS 2016).

The so-called 'first NZS' was a typical social movement: there was a goal of promoting social change, the involvement of thousands, and the classical repertoire of strikes, sit-ins, boycotts, and minimal formal organisation. Introducing martial law made the NZS illegal, and many of the activists were interned, though some of them acted for the cause in conspiracy (Siennicki 2006). In 1982, the authorities agreed on formal organisation of student representatives at the universities: 'all students of universities are organized in a student representation and are its members regardless of their organisational membership' (HE Law 1982). Thus, many NZS activists joined self-governments. Organisations of students' representatives, together with universities' administration, were responsible for the division of scholarships and benefits. Moreover, they were entitled to express opinion about all student issues that were being discussed at each university. Since 1982, students became formal members of senates and faculty boards; they shared their access with PhD students and young academics (in total forming 18%–24.5% of seats in every governing body). The accurate number should have been specified in each HEI's statute. Organisations of student representatives in Polish universities were decided at year level, course of study level, faculty level, dormitory and student estate level, and finally, at central level (HE Law 1982). The voting procedure was determined by self-government's regulations that had to be consistent with the statute of a given university.

Until 1986, the NZS had no official structures: activists stayed 'undercover'. Between 1986 and 1989, the association functioned openly, but it failed to gain formal registration (Kalendarium NZS 2017). To the strengths of NZS, we can add its numerous personnel (throughout the last 30 years, it has had 190,000 activists in all major academic centres); a strong group of supporters; contacts with the Solidarity movement; and a clear, convincing message: 'together we can win, there's no success without NZS' (Anusz 2000). This general attitude suited the 1980s, but quickly became obsolete under new political conditions. The organisation was fighting against the communist regime, and when it collapsed there was no need to rebel. Although NZS was not formally accepted by authorities as an official body of student representatives, throughout the 1980s it was indeed the most influential organisation, and the voice of students of that decade[11]. The only drawback was its repertoire of actions. Strikes, sit-ins, boycotts and protests are effective in a time of unrest, but after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the NZS required serious reorganisation, including the formation of new goals.

In 1990, the NZS became entangled in politics: in that year, it supported Lech Wałęsa during his presidential campaign. A year later, some of its members joined the Liberal Democratic Congress (a political party that existed in parliament during 1991–1993). This party was opposed to the scrutiny of old activists and general decommunization: this was unacceptable for almost half of NZS members, who in the end left the organisation. Political friction and conflicts inside organisation lasted throughout the 1990s, and the NZS also lost most of its mass support among ordinary students: thus, the NZS wasted one of its major strengths (Anusz 2000). In 2001 and 2002, the NZS tried to resuscitate its social movement potential: it organized nationwide protests against the authorities, who had decided to remove students' transport allowance (Kalendarium NZS 2017). However, it did not succeed until 2011, when the elected president, Bronisław Komorowski, promised discounts for students in his campaign (PAP 2010).

The modern NZS lacks the potential that it had 25 years ago. Nowadays, it is just another student organisation that exists at some (but not all) universities. It has a distinguished history and many famous former members, including leading politicians from the right and centre wing of the political scene. The current profile of the organisation has shifted towards education and work experience. The NZS is organizing, for instance, actions of blood donation; competitions for 'best student', 'best thesis' and other contests of this kind; and workshops for professional development. More interesting initiatives include a series of meetings and conferences 'Nothing about us without us': their goal is to promote a student presence in public debate.[12]

Time has not treated the NZS kindly. It has lost many members, supporters, and its purpose for existence. With the outflow of members, it has also lost many of its resources (money came from donations, or Solidarity). Unlike the ZSP, the NZS was never deeply embedded in universities' structures. Universities' support for such

11 It is a commonly known fact repeated by all Polish researchers of the subject.

12 All information about the modern NZS can be found here: nzs.org.pl.

organisations is not compulsory, and takes the form of a purposeful subsidy (HE Law 2005, Art. 204, para. 3). Political parties provide a certain amount of support, but generally, the organisation has had to find a new place within the SM. As a result, the NZS is now an organisation of marginal importance.

PSRP

The PSRP is the youngest but most important actor in the Polish SM[13]. The first attempt to establish central organisation of students'representatives was undertaken in 1990, when the 'Agreement of Polish Student Representations' (Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Samorządów Studenckich: OPSS) appeared. It was created by representatives of local self-governments, mainly from three academic centres[14]. One incentive to prompt this process was the introduction the HE Law from 1990 where the legislator included a possibility of forming a central organisation (Art. 157). The decision had pragmatic grounds as within the history of students, it had always complemented what the system could not deliver. Student self-help organisations existed even when Poland was not on the map (Smużewska 2012, p. 157–180). They filled structural holes in respect of financial-aid, work-experience, housing, equipping libraries and laboratories; in fact, everything that was needed. The students' representatives from universities had more adequate organisational know-how than the NZS trained in protests. On the other hand, the ZSP was discredited among students. These organisations proved to be too focused on central politics to perceive this new entity as an opportunity. In consequence, in the face of a real chance to create central representation, only three student communities were ready to take it.

Their beginnings were not easy, however, and reaching any agreement for those three-founder members was a challenge. Hence, it become mission impossible when next ones joined the organisation. The OPSS was badly organised and ineffective and soon had many critics. Between 1990-1994, it had met 22 times, but no important provisions were made (Szymik-Kozaczko 2012). In 1995 OPSS was transformed into the Student Parliament of Republic of Poland (Parlament Studentów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej: PSRP) that still exists today. Since the mid-1990s, this single official body has had the exclusive legal right to represent all students what should be viewed as a success (Kieraciński 1997). Hence, it needed charismatic leader and reorganisation (Szymik-Kozaczko 2012).

The OPPS/PSRP was created through a bottom-up process. In the beginning, it emulated the structure of local self-governments: it had a president, a board and a general assembly. Now, it has a general council of students (12 elected members), an executive board (a president and six members responsible for executing the provisions of the council), a revision committee, a student ombudsman, and some agents appointed for specific tasks. The council, the board and the specialized commissions are more complicated than those of a typical university's self-government (Statute of PSRP 2016), due to their different role in comparison with local representative organisations. Since 2005 the president of parliament, together with selected activists, have become members of the Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA), the Main Council for Higher Education (RGSzW) and various parliamentary commissions (HE Law 2005). Students holding such positions and the student ombudsman (who is also a student, usually of law) rarely disagree with the authorities and their policy.[15] It is difficult to determine whether these activists are being manipulated or ignored by the 'political kitchen', but their position is usually moderate and open to compromise.[16]

The purpose of the PSRP is to represent all students from the whole sector, and to promote education. Theoretically, the personnel (activists) of the organisation includes around 415 representatives from all student self-governments (in theory, one delegate can represent a few universities if they have less than a thousand students). In order for the conclusions of the general assembly to be valid, 60 representatives, one from each of 60 HEIs, are needed (Statute of PSRP 2016). However, in reality, not all HEIs send delegates to the general assembly. The

13 It is important due to the HE Law that indicates PSRP as the only authorized body of students' representatives. Also it is most recognizable and influential among students.

14 In this case those were Warsaw, Cracow and (according to the former president of PSRP) Poznan. All those cities were, at that time, hosts to an old and prestigious university, a technical university and a medical academia, not to mention less important colleges, The early OPSS was not built by literally three organisations but rather by three student communities from three cities. Besides, it was always the case that the biggest impact on student environment as such came from Cracow (historical capital) and Warsaw (current capital).

15 A conclusion based on the analysis of statements published by PSRP on Twitter and Facebook.

16 In confident language, activists declare the need to introduce fees or to close down HEIs that they consider too weak to survive. They represent a rather elitist vision of the HE system. As one former president said in an interview: 'I'm really fed up with modern students. They are like rams. Don't understand anything, only focused on material aspects of studying' (2015).

PSRP is dominated by full-time students from public, well-established universities. The organisation gains resources in the form of subsidies from the authorities: for instance, in 2011, the Supreme Audit Office determined that this would be 807,000 zloty, equal to around 200,000 euros per year (SAO 2012). However, the PSRP's contacts are its key asset, and these are being developed due to the participation of various commissions and expert teams. Since the beginning of PSRP, there have been 14 presidents, two of whom are recognizable and have had political careers; however, because the organisation is still young, one cannot judge the future prospects of the other former presidents. The language used by activists is focused on legal and financial aspects, because these are the issues for which PSRP is being consulted. Its declared values involve independence, self-government, student needs, and the protection of rights. These are not very specific and on this basis, there is no difference between PSRP and other student organisations. The association is entitled to represent all students abroad, in international unions and associations: this is also an advantage, because the ZSP and NZS lack such prerogatives (Statute of PSRP 2016)[17].

The potential of the SM from the perspective of its main organizational actors

Recent research (Szafraniec 2011; Marzęcki & Stach 2016) shows that Polish youth are focused on their individual career and comfort, instead of political activity. Politics is not an important element in their life, and they do not trust politicians. People in the age category 18–25 have the lowest rate of participation in parliamentary elections (between 38.1% and 55% in the years 1997–2015); in the wider world trend, this can be called 'deficit of citizenship', but luckily it passes with age (Szafraniec 2011: 280). Furthermore, students are not particularly interested in universities' affairs. A good illustration of this trend is the low turnout at self-government elections. Representatives of faculties' self-governments are chosen by the votes of a minority of students (this especially happens in bigger HEIs). This raises questions not only about their credibility but also about the credibility of presidents.[18]

Moreover, there is no cooperation between the ZSP, NZS and PSRP as all three work independently. The first obstacle is their history and different ideological involvement: the ZSP previously related to communists, and after 1989 to the post-communists; the NZS has been associated with the opposition, and later with liberal and conservative parties; and the PSRP has continued to accept the policies of current authorities (first leftist, later liberal, and now conservative). The second impediment is the organisations' asymmetry of location in the SM. According to law, the PSRP is an official representative body of all students, whereas the NZS and ZSP are just common organisations, sharing the same status with many others. Consequently, there are also differences in their goals' formulation. The PSRP is much more pragmatic, because this is necessary for constant cooperation with the authorities. This practical approach may also be connected with its short organisational history. Certainly, in the foreseeable future, it is not likely that the three organisations will collaborate to coordinate a new form of SM.

We should also ask the question why the SM, understood as group of student organisations, is focused on preserving the status quo instead of striving to change the system[19]. The author suggests that this is because the organisations emerged as the side-effects of social movements, and are interested in the maintenance of gains. In moments of social unrest, it would be difficult to predict who would win, and displaying the organisational logos during protests would put them at risk of losing the battle. In the case of the ZSP, an additional hindrance is the unpopularity of its political backing and history. The NZS's problem lies in its resources and personnel, while the PSRP's difficulty stems from the fact that it usually takes the side of the authorities. Although the organisations experience their own obstacles, they all still have too much to lose by opposing the system. As a result, recent protests have been organized without the contribution and support of the 'old' organisations: examples are given below.

The initiative called 'Engaged University' emerged at the University of Warsaw in the spring of 2015, when

17 It doesn't mean that any other organisation didn't try to become a member of an international federation. For instance, the ZSP was member of ESIB (The National Unions of Students in Europe) but for Polish authorities it is the PSRP that should join such entities and is supported in that regard. Other student organisations join international federations on their own initiative.

18 A generalisation made on the basis of interviews conducted with activists during research on the student scientific movement, 2014–2015.

19 By 'status quo' author means the position of organisations that are embedded in certain HE system. Claims to change the HE may cause deterioration of those positions. Basically, the issue is the access to resources, recognition by the authorities and in case of the ZSP and the NZS also support of political parties.

the administration decided to introduce higher fees for submitting theses (Bendyk 2015). Students felt that the planned law would penalize the most ambitious students who wished to prepare the best possible work. They used social media to communicate, and gathered in protest; this happened without any support from the 'old' structures. Students created a petition that was signed by 3,000 students and 160 lecturers. The protest was undermined by the local self-government, which decided not to organize a referendum. It '(...) was not even put to a vote as this early proposal was rejected. It was the moment when students' patience ran out – they were disgusted and disillusioned with Parliament's politicking and opportunism, disappointed with their voice being ignored and a calculated obedience of parliamentarians towards the higher authorities of the university' (Bendyk 2015). Ultimately, the local self-government bowed to student expectations, but without the direct pressure of protesters the result could have been different.

When students from Poznań, Wrocław and other centres went on the streets in winter of last year, the organizers claimed: 'we're not connected to any political party and we're not interested in building anybody's political capital' (Redakcja Radia ZET 2017). They again protested against the ruling party and the authorities via Facebook. Claims were formulated regarding current affairs: the freedom of religion and the secular state, the defence of the weak, and combatting issues such as xenophobia, the destruction of natural resources in national parks, and Poland's isolation within the UE. Due to the variety of views among students, the organizers clearly asserted their independence and impartiality. The protest was designed in the form of 'no logo'. According to social media, more than a thousand students participated in these demonstrations.

In the case of 'Engaged University', the problem was seen as local, which may explain why the traditional student organisations did not support it. With regard to the winter protests, the reason was political: the group of students who organized it was associated with the KOD (Committee for Defending Democracy) and the union of teachers who were already protesting against the educational reform. Supporting the protests meant taking the side of the opposition in the ongoing political dispute. It might have been expected that the planned HE reform would activate all the organisations in leading the SM, but nothing of the sort took place.

Conclusions

When a new HE law called 'Law 2.0' was formulated in 2016 (Tomala 2017), the initial new ideas were produced without consulting the PSRP or other organisations. In May 2016, consultations with experts and scientists started. The PSRP's first public comments about the bill appeared on Twitter and Facebook at the end of 2016; however, the NZS or ZSP were not consulted. The PSRP stated that students were 'absent' from the procedure, and at first the organisation presented its own views regarding the HE reform (PCG Academia 2017). After a series of meetings, the PSRP seemed to support the project; however, the 'Law 2.0.' has contributed certain ideas such as entrance exams for selected courses and the elongation of part-time studies (HE Law. The Project 2017), which may not be supported by ordinary students. Nonetheless, the PSRP seems satisfied with its accomplishments (PSRP 2017). This situation illustrates the fact that the PSRP not only fails to try to use its mobilizing potential (whether it exists or not), but it also ignores the claims of average students. According to the old Roman saying, 'bread and games', the PSRP focuses on maintaining financial stability (i.e. 'bread'). It preserves the level of scholarships and avoids the introduction of tuition fees at universities. Local representations provide the 'games' in form of spring festivals (*juwenalia*), and hope that everybody will be happy. The author raises a question what circumstances must arise in order for such organisations to activate and take on their traditional role as leaders in the student movement.

Last year, few situations occurred that could potentially revive the Polish student movement. We have already stated that this revival most probably wouldn't come from the 'old' organisations even though they have certain resources, experiences, political connections and personnel. In theory, each of the organisations described could lead a collective action. The problem is that they seem interested in maintaining their status in the current system instead of challenging it and risking failure. Without organisational support, neither protests at the University of Warsaw (an 'Engaged University') nor students' protests against authorities in winter this year would have had an impact on wider politics. It also doesn't seem to be the case that the controversy surrounding 'Law 2.0.' will lead the students to the streets without organisational coordination. Although the problems seem important (student privileges, human rights, state policy priorities), a student response remains limited.

If the ZSP, the NZS and the PSRP are quite compliant, one can wonder why there's no alternative – either

organisational or less institutionalized – to advance the systemic agenda and increase power? There are certain pressure tactics, like 'Engaged University' but why they do not generalize? Author's tentative guess is that the era of general national movements (not only student movements) is over. Societies are too diversified and atomized. Unlike in the previous political system, there is no important issue to fight for. Additionally, student environment is not an elite any more (ca. 50% of age cohort enters tertiary education), it is much more pragmatic and also diversified (differences between sectors if HE system, modes of studies, type and prestige of the particular HEIs and faculties, between social and geographic origin of students). The disappearance of once original and valuable student culture may also be an issue. Though we have fast and effective forms of communication, in case of SM we fail to use it as a mobilizing tool. Online protests die almost immediately after birth.

In this article, the author has tried to describe the Polish student movement in terms of organisational theory. No social movement can exist without at least minimal organisational support, therefore key actors (the ZSP, the NZS, the PSRP) of Polish student movement were identified and their features characterised. Nowadays, the strongest of those seems to be the PSRP due to its close relations with the authorities. Nonetheless none of the organisations wish to initiate real changes in HE system or in the society in general. This is partly because those organisations seem to be isolated elites, not related to the daily problems of students. Secondly, there are no challenges significant enough, like those occurring before 1989, that could activate them and wake up the masses. There is no universal issue to fight for, no masses to lead and only niches remain for those organisations to occupy.

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