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## The path towards establishing the University of Opole

### Introduction

In 1950, Opole became the capital of the newly established Opolskie voivodeship. In the past Opole was the capital of the duchy and when the duchy became a part of Prussia in 1816 it became the seat of the Regency of Opole. However, Opole did not have any academic traditions. In the interwar period, German social democrats indicated in 1932 that the Regency of Opole had the lowest education attainment rate in Germany and proposed that establishing a university could improve this state of affairs. However, following Hitler's arrival in power implementation of this idea became impossible (Nicieja, 1990, p. 11; Nicieja, 2004, p. 190). During the period when Opole was a part of Germany this area was primarily inhabited by the people of German origin residing in the cities and by more than 500 thousand people of Polish descent residing in the rural areas. There was no Polish intelligentsia. The Opole Silesia region remained beyond the territory of Poland for over 600 years and the German staff policy of the XIX and the XX century made social promotion of the local residents dependant on the degree of their affiliation with the German nation. Until conclusion of the Second World War the qualified personnel was educated in the German interior. In the interwar period and earlier still persons possessing money and motivated enough to change their social standing could receive education in secondary and tertiary German schools. Graduating from these schools was usually related to the loss of graduates to the detriment of the Polish minority in the Opole region.

Following the conclusion of the Second World War, this region became a part of the Polish territory. In 1945 the region of Opole was almost completely devoid of intelligentsia because German engineers, teachers and officials had departed to other regions. After the end of the conflict this rural area primarily experienced influx of the farmers from the Eastern Borderlands and the central Poland among whom there were no people possessing higher education.

## The attempts at establishing a humanities university

Under such circumstances political authorities were making efforts aimed at establishing an academic institution in Opole since the Fifties of the past century. These efforts were at that time political in character. During the meeting of the Presidium of the National Voivodeship Council in Opole towards the end of 1952 the ideas were considered concerning establishing: a Higher Agricultural School – as intended by the head of the Agriculture Department, Jan Baron, establishing a Medical Academy – as advocated by the head of the Health and Welfare Department, Norbert Jacoby, and establishing a Higher School of Pedagogy – as envisioned by Teodor Musioł, the then head of the Education Department of the National Voivodeship Council. Teodor Musioł justified his proposition with the necessity of developing own teaching staff intended for work in the region of Opole because the teachers settling in the area were usually graduates of secondary pedagogical schools.

At that time the Opole region was rather peculiar in character and nature. The native population remaining in the area consisted of graduates of German schools and was in large part using the local Silesian dialect. Thus the process of re-Polonisation had to be carried out which required personnel with excellent substantive preparation who were familiar with the historical background and condition of these lands. T. Musioł used the following arguments to support his proposition:

working as an Educational Officer I was able to notice the teachers who were not familiar with the community and the area in which they were supposed to work; they did not know its history and specificity. It is why a school of humanities and a modern teacher are needed in this period crucial for the Opolski region, the time following the long period of extensive Germanisation (Borek, Jakubowski, 1970, p. 12).

T. Musioł recalled several year later:

Since I have taken over this position – I have been occupied with the idea of establishing the Higher School of Pedagogy in Opole. (...) ... I frequently indicated the need for establishing a higher education institution in Opole which would be closely connected to the life of the Opole region, its needs and culture-education aspirations. It was so because the region of Opole was returned to Poland deprived of own intellectual elites (Musioł, 1970, p. 263).

T. Musioł convinced Jadwiga Ludwińska, the II Secretary of the Voivodeship Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party who was responsible for the affairs of culture, education and science, to his idea.

This idea began to materialise when the significant accommodation and staff-related difficulties emerged in the State Higher School of Pedagogy in Wrocław which was established and was operating since the 1st of September 1950. This school was

established on the grounds of the Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1950 regarding establishing the State Higher School of Pedagogy in Wrocław as a higher vocational school formed on the foundation of the Institute of Pedagogy of the Polish Teachers' Union. The School operated in extreme accommodation conditions but it possessed a very strong education and teaching staff. The Ministry of Education demanded from the management of the School to either provide the School with proper premises and facilities required for studying or to relocate to a different city. Opole demonstrated the willingness and capacity for establishing conditions conducive to development of the School (Borek, Jakubowski, 1970, p. 19).

The official works regarding establishing the HSP in Opole were launched upon the application submitted by T. Musioł on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 1953. The factors hindering establishment of the School consisted of the shortage of a proper scientific staff and inadequacy of the scientific book collection available on site. Under the pressure of *fait accompli* (developing campus and erecting School's facilities without proper permissions) the central authorities began to consider moving the Wrocław HSP to Opole (Nicieja, 2004, p. 16). The efforts made by T. Musioł and the party authorities in Opole resulted in the accommodation problems of the Wrocław school contributing to the Council of Ministers making the decision regarding moving the seat of the school from Wrocław to Opole on the grounds of the Resolution no. 698. Changing School's location was primarily related to political issues. Opole was to become the science and research centre engaged in the studies on the history of Silesia, its culture and language. During inauguration of the first academic year on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 1954 the Vice-Minister for Education said:

Opening the first higher education institution in the region of Opole is the event of momentous political and cultural significance. (...) The goal of this school is to prepare the teaching staff for the rapidly developing schools. (...) Schools always held great influence over the region of Opole. A school was a hotspot for Polish tradition and a centre of national and social work. In reference to this tradition we wish for the HSP to become a focal point of scientific, cultural and educational work, a source of political and educational influence on the community of Opole, on the villages and towns of the region (Kolbuszewski, 1960, p. 112).

## **The Higher School of Pedagogy in Opole**

Following the subsequent relocation of the HSP to Opole in terms of organisation the School consisted of two faculties: the Faculty of Philology and the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics. From the very beginning appropriate accommodation conditions were established for didactic work. The School received the school buildings previously belonging to the Pedagogical Secondary School (the three buildings located at

Luboszycka Street). The buildings had classrooms for delivering lectures, a library and rooms for the commuting teaching staff. These rooms were necessary because the teaching staff initially consisted of the employees from Wrocław, some of whom decided to move to Opole permanently. The academic youth was provided with 350 spots in three dormitories.

Work was simultaneously progressing on erecting own didactic facility and a dormitory hall. As early as in January 1954 T. Musioł organised the Civic Committee for Development of the Higher School of Pedagogy. Although the construction works had come across numerous hindrances these obstacles were ultimately topped and within two years time a new building and a hall of residences were released for use. A year later construction work concluded on the accommodation facilities with 26 apartments for teaching staff – a fact which significantly improved living conditions of the teaching staff. Many teachers commuting from Wrocław took residence there. The infrastructure of the School improved and the number of students was growing. The continuous and dynamic growth of the School was evidenced through development of new study courses and growth of the scientific personnel. The authorities of the school experienced support and care of the political authorities of the region as well as the administration of the city and the voivodeship throughout the entire period of adapting to the new location.

Establishing the HSP significantly contributed to development of the scientific and cultural life in Opole. “Kwartalnik Opolski [Opole Quarterly]” journal was launched under the initiative of the staff of the Faculty of Pedagogy in December 1954; its primary tasks consisted of “discovering, learning and recording the truth of the past of the Silesian Opole region and participation in shaping the awareness and culture of the socialist nation” (Borek, Jakubowski, 1970, p. 69). The Opole Division of the Adam Mickiewicz Literary Association was established in 1955 upon the initiative of the staff of the Faculty of Pedagogy; the Association invited exceptional Polish philologists to deliver open lectures. Upon the initiative of the then Rector, prof. Stanisław Kolbuszewski “Zeszyty Naukowe [Scientific Notebooks]” university journal began publishing as early as in 1956 in order to support scientific development of young employees of the School (Kolbuszewski, 1960, pp. 116–117).

The subsequent years were characterised by the constant growth in the number of scientific staff members their promotions, growing number of students and development of new fields of study and courses. Throughout the years requirements were met concerning obtaining full academic rights, i.e. the rights to conduct post-doctoral proceedings and habilitation proceedings.

,Riding the wave of the October transformations students were discussing in the very first years of activity of the HSP in Opole the issues of reforming the Higher School of Pedagogy into a university with the contemporary authorities of Voivodeship Governor’s office. These ideas were treated as a utopian pipe dream (Nicieja, 2004,

p. 191). Also in the Sixties of the past century the voices concerning taking actions aimed at fulfilling the dream of residents of Opole regarding establishing a university in the city rose among the scientific community.

### **The work towards establishing a university**

The struggles aimed at establishing a university lasted more than twenty years. Various professional circles of Opole and the region joined the discussion on this subject. Meetings were organised between the authorities of the School and the voivodeship in the Seventies of the XX century during which the possibility of realising the postulate concerning securing the rank of a university for the HSP was discussed. During the meeting held on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1970 with Artur Starewicz, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party responsible for the affairs of science and culture, prof. Jan Sereyka claimed that: "We are taking actions aimed at transforming the Higher Pedagogical School in Opole into a university through establishing the Faculties of Law, Economy and Agriculture" (Malarski, 1994, p. 21). The Central Committee's Secretary undertook to try to convince the authorities in Warszawa of the need to establish a university in Opole. December 1970 and the changes it brought to the government and the party authorities changed this attitude.

The efforts concerning establishing a university gained in strength in the Eighties of the XX century. The leadership of the Higher Pedagogical School as well as the political authorities of the Opolskie voivodeship took actions addressed to the state and political authorities concerning transforming the School into a university. Unfortunately, at that time these actions received no support from political authorities nor were they supported by the leadership of other Polish universities. Even in the Opole community there were opponents of this concept. Journalists were particularly prominent opponents of the idea and justified their attitude in the following way:

Working towards establishing a university in Opole is a display of a peculiar megalomania. Opole is an environment and community too insignificant to meaningfully contribute to the scientific life of the country. The status similar to an American college is sufficient enough for the HSP in Opole.

This argument was also used by the other neighbouring academic centres, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and the Department of Education of the Central Committee of the PUWP. Similarly, the representatives of the central and voivodeship-level Party circles indicated that the endeavours regarding establishing a university in Opole are pointless (Nicieja, 2001, pp. 53–55).

Employees of the HSP were the primary instigators of the actions aimed at establishing a university in Opole. At that time, in 1981, the employees referred to and invoked the political, economical and socio-cultural arguments. The political arguments

were based on the specificity of the region and the lack of own intellectual elites (intelligentsia) during the period of region's allegiance to Germany. During the period of the Polish People's Republic (the PPL) the higher education in the Opole region was neglected; this fact resulted in the outflow of educated residents to cities where they could take up university-level education.

The discussion regarding the need for establishing a university was interrupted by introduction of the martial law on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1981. Professor Marian Adamus, Rector of the School in the difficult 1981–1984 period, was a person particularly involved in the activities related to transforming the HSP into a university. In his electoral agenda, prof. Adamus indicated that the possibility of transforming the School in Opole into a classical university existed should the School met the substantive and organisational requirements – the same requirements other universities operating in the country had to meet. During prof. Adamus's term of office the number of independent employees, both the employees procured externally and the employees produced as a result of the academic promotion of the scholars from Opole, grew significantly. Prof. Adamus also worked towards improving the education facilities' support base, for instance he was able to secure the building initially intended for the Voivodeship Committee of the PUWP and converted it into the new premises for the school library following conclusion of construction and modernisation works (Nowakowska 2012, p. 12).

In 1984, the period difficult and tumultuous for the entire Poland, the issue concerning establishing a university in Opole through transforming the HSP was debated in the press and radio of the Opole region. During the martial law period of 1982 the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth was established and the then Vice-Rector for Science, prof. Maria Nowakowska, became involved with it. Upon her application the Voivodeship Council of the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth in Opole adopted the *Resolution regarding supporting the initiative of establishing a university in Opole* on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1983. Jan Dobraczyński – the Chairman of the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth- was appealed to with a plea for support and taking actions on central authorities' level (Archiwum Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 1988, p. 2). Prof. M. Nowakowska along with assistant professor Stanisław Gajda organised talks regarding establishing a new university on the local and central levels. Unfortunately, the central authorities were not sympathetic towards this initiative and communicated that no actions related to the issue of establishing a university in Opole will be taken.

The discussions regarding establishing a university were also initiated during the term of office of the subsequent rector, prof. Stanisław Krochman; in the autumn of 1984 the team consisting of Rector's coworkers developed a concept for transforming the HSP into a university. This concept was discussed during the open meeting of the PUWP in December 1984 (Kochman et al., 1985 p. 32). Some of the participants of the meeting were sceptical towards this concept and considered it impossible to

implement. During the discussion questions were posed whether the issue consisted of factually establishing a proper university or only in changing the name of the School. Some believed that the demands regarding establishing a university in Opole were a display of the inferiority complex of the Opole community. During the voting only 20% of voters were in favour of establishing a university (Nicieja, 2004, p. 161). We must recall that at that time the Opole HSP was recognised as the best pedagogical higher education institution in the country. This view was expressed by ministers Benon Miśkiewicz and Jacek Fisiak in the appropriate missives imparting a wide range of autonomy upon the School along with the right to engage in far reaching experiments regarding education methods. This is why many of the voting indicated that it is better to be the best Higher Pedagogy School than the worst university.

The issue of establishing a university in Opole was also tackled during the Sejm election campaign in 1985. According to propositions the new university was supposed to be established on the basis of the merger between the HSP and the Higher Engineering School. The involvement of prof. M. Nowakowska in the efforts related to establishing a university continued and on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 1986 a resolution was adopted during the meeting of the Voivodeship Council of the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth regarding launching the new stage of the work towards establishing a university. The task of M. Nowakowska was to form a group of people from both Schools willing to launch and take actions aimed at integration of both institutions. It was the so called Initiating Work Team consisting of 9 people (Nowakowska, 2021, p. 13) ; the Initiating Work Team developed the initial concept for establishing a university on the basis of integration of two Schools. This concept was widely discussed during the open public meetings with various groups of residents of the region and was met with approval. Unfortunately, this initiative was received very poorly by the central and local press as well as by some of the academic communities. These attacks were systematically repelled, primarily by Stanisław Nicieja, by presenting substantive justifications published in the regional and local press (Nowakowska, 2012, p. 13).

The emerging difficulties did not inhibit the efforts related to establishing a university but certain problems came to light regardless. In 1988 the opinion of employees and authorities of the Higher School of Engineering on the issue of combining both Schools and establishing a university was negative. School's authorities supported the idea of establishing a university but without participation of the HES. In March 1988 the Social Committee for Establishing a University in Opole was founded and PhD Kazimierz Dzierżan – voivode of the Opolskie voivodeship – became its Chairman. Members of the Committee developed three models of a university. The first two models assumed merging the HSP and the HES whereas the third autonomous model assumed establishing a university through transforming the HSP. Alas, the third model had little to no chance of succeeding. The shortest path towards a university led through realising one of the first two models. However, realising these merger-based

models was impossible because the authorities of the HES, its Senate and Rectorate, did not express their permission (12<sup>th</sup> of October 1988). Simultaneously the voivodeship Party authorities forced by the central authorities withdrew from participation in the actions aimed at establishing the University (Nowakowska, 2012, p. 27). Under these circumstances prof. M. Nowakowska turned on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 1988 to the Bishop of Opole, Alfons Nossol, for expressing his opinion on the matter. The bishop supported the actions of the committee and simultaneously indicated that he wished for the Faculty of Theology to be included in the structure of the new university. Establishing this new university would be possible on the foundation of the Diocesan Theology and Pastoral Institute, which was a branch of the Catholic University of Lublin and the Higher Theological Seminary in Nysa. Such solution should also be satisfactory to the Ministry of National Education because the Ministry indicated in multiple instances that establishing a university should be effected on the basis of integration of Polish higher education institutions (Nossol, 1994, p. 4). In December 1989 bishop Nossol invited the Minister of National Education, prof. Henryk Samsonowicz, to Opole to demonstrate the actions for the benefit of establishing a university already taken by the community. The minister indicated that the only way for the university to be established was the integration with the HES. However, the HES did not approve of this idea. The Bishop himself engaged in a dialogue with the Senate of the HES but the discussions produced no results. In 1990 the attempt was made at establishing a federal university in cooperation with the HES. In the initial stage these two institutions were supposed to retain their financial independence. This proposition was also rejected by the other School (Nowakowska 2012, p. 30).

Since December 1991 the office of the Chairman of the Committee for Establishing a University in Opole was held by Bishop A. Nossol (this position was relinquished by K. Dzierżan). At that time the draft for “*the Application for establishing a University in Opole through merging the Higher School of Pedagogy, the Diocesan Theological and Pastoral Institute and the Silesian Institute*” was presented. Unfortunately the director of the Silesian Institute did not approve of this proposition. Therefore only the HSP and the Diocesan Theological and Pastoral Institute were willing to form the new higher education institution. At that time the conditions and requirements for establishing a new university were not clearly defined by the Ministry. Vice-minister for National Education Roman Duda obliged towards the end of 1991 to define these requirements clearly. The “Substantive requirements for establishing a university-type higher education institution” were developed upon his initiative. In 1992 also the General Council for Higher Education formulated the criteria a community wishing to establish a university would have to meet. What these criteria were? A higher education institution wishing to transform into a university would have to employ 60 independent scientific employees, provide Master’s degree courses in 6 fields of study, hold the right to conduct doctoral proceedings and confer an academic degree of PhD in 6 disciplines and



the right to confer an academic degree of habilitated doctor in 2 disciplines. Additionally the HSP in Opole had to procure positive reviews of three university Senates from: the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, the University of Warsaw and the University of Wrocław. The HSP did not meet one requirement – the School lacked the rights to conduct doctoral proceedings in one discipline. This criterion was met in 1993.

The application for establishing a university was delivered to Minister Andrzej Stelmachowski by Bishop A. Nossol in March 1992. The application was passed for review to the General Council for Higher Education which turned to three universities for expressing opinion: the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, the University of Warsaw and the University of Wrocław. All these universities were supportive of the endeavours of the community of Opole, although the University of Wrocław submitted a long-term proposition for their realisation. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 1993 the General Council for Higher Education accepted the initiative of establishing a university in Opole. The final version of the *Application for establishing the University of Opole on the basis of the HSP and the Diocesan Theological and Pastoral Institute* was prepared in June 1993. This version of the application served as the basis for the legislative procedure in the Sejm and the Senate. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 1993 Bishop Nossol and Rector of the HSP, prof. Jerzy Pośpiech, passed the application to Prime Minister E. Suchocka and the Minister of Education. Unfortunately, the Social Committee of the Council of Ministers did not approve of establishing a university in Opole quoting lack of funds for realisation of this goal as justification (Archiwum Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 1993, Senat, p. 31). Dissolution of the cabinet of Hanna Suchocka, who was interested in developing a rapid legislative path for establishment of a university in Opole, hampered and inhibited the actions regarding this matter.

Under these circumstances the parliamentarians from Opole, upon initiative of left-wing deputy Jerzy Szteliga – an assistant professor at the HSP in Opole, submitted the draft of the act directly to the Sejm towards the end of 1993 and thus skipped the cabinet level. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1993 the issue was reviewed by the Sejm Commission for Science and Higher Education and was approved (Archiwum Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, Prtokoly, p. 149). On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1994 all parliamentary clubs supported the application during meeting of the Sejm. A voting was carried out as a result – out of the 363 present deputies 353 voted in favour of establishing a university, 3 voted against and 7 withheld from voting.

The Ministry of National Education began preparations for drafting the Act on establishing the University of Opole which was to be the first public university following the conclusion of the Second World War to include the Faculty of Theology within its structure. The permission for establishing the University was also granted by the Polish episcopate. Bishop A. Nossol also applied to the Catholic Education Congregation in Rome for launching the procedure for the canonical founding of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Opole. The procedure concluded on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September

of 1994 with the Congregation issuing the Decree regarding establishing the Faculty of Theology (Nowakowska, 2012, p. 38).

In October 1994 the first academic year of the twelfth Polish university was inaugurated. At that time the University of Opole consisted of four faculties and provided education to 9050 students. The newly established university presented an opportunity of further dynamic development to the academic community of Opole. Over nearly thirty years of operations the University contributed to sparking education aspirations and interest in the broadly understood humanities and thus became the centre of the intellectual life in the Opole Silesia region.

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## **Abstract**

The goal of this paper is to present the difficult path towards establishing a university in Opole. In 1994 the University was established through merging the contemporary Higher School of Pedagogy with the Opole branch of the Catholic University of Lublin. The efforts regarding transforming the HSP into a university took more than 20 years. Particular involvement in the matter was displayed by the employees of the institution, the Bishop of Opole and the administrative authorities of the voivodeship. The University created actual opportunity of taking up university-level studies by the local youth on site, without the need for moving out to another region. The attempt has been made on the basis of the available monographs, studies and archival materials at reconstructing the path the consecutive Rector authorities had been taking since 1970 until the establishment of the University of Opole by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1994.

**Keywords:** the University of Opole, the Higher School of Pedagogy, local community initiatives, political background, cultural background