Struggling to unite: the rise and fall of one university movement in Poland[1]

Magdalena Prusinowska, Piotr Kowzan and Małgorzata Zielińska
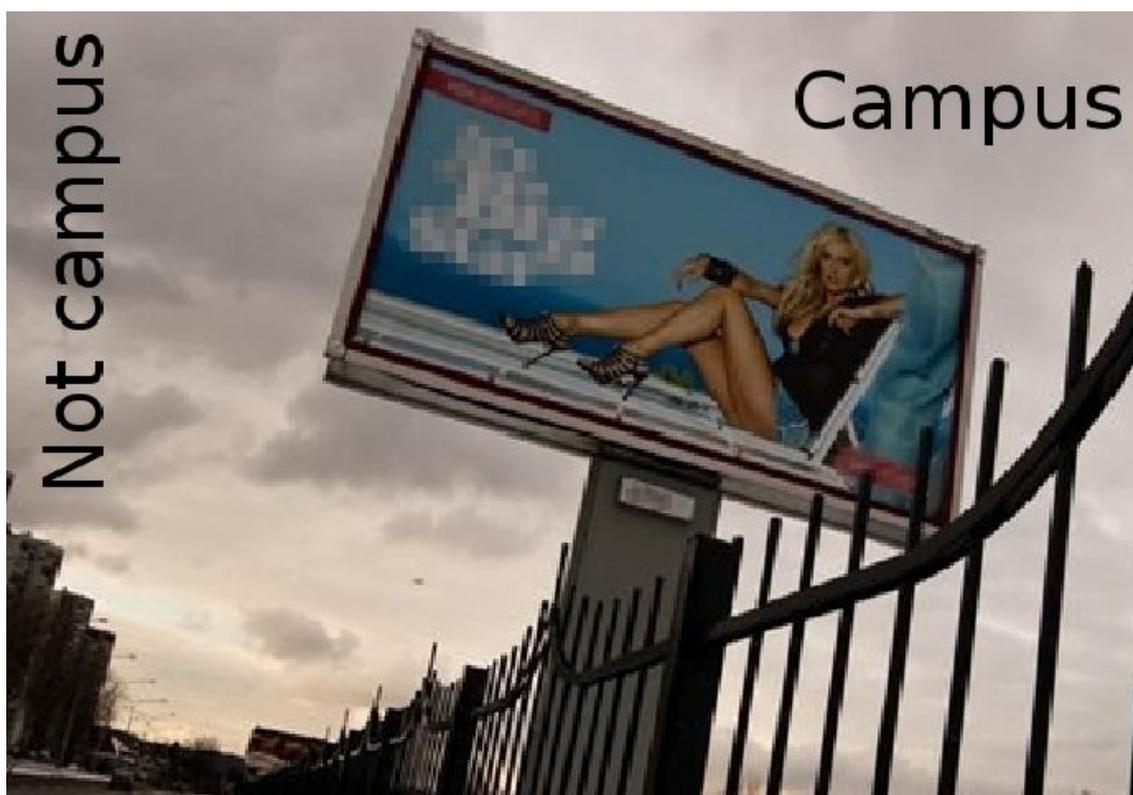
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Abstract

The recent wave of student protests in Europe, which gained momentum in 2008, has had some impact on appearance of a number of Polish student movements, such as one movement in Gdańsk, called OKUPÉ – Open Committee for Liberation of the Educational Space. Using international student networks as background for our analysis, we focus on OKUPÉ, which we were participants of. The movement had an active beginning and managed to gather a considerable number of people demanding changes at

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[1] Some ideas from this article were presented by the authors at the XVII World Congress of Sociology (16.07.2010) under the title "Struggling to get united. A contemporary student movement in Poland as a part of international networks."

Interface: a journal for and about social movements   *Article*
Volume 4 (1): 327 - 359 (May 2012)   *Prusinowska, Kowzan, Zielińska,*
                                                           Struggling to unite

the university, including relations of power, surveillance policy, equality issues, participation in decision-making processes and spatial planing at the new campus.

However, the promising beginning has not yet led to a continuous mobilisation and the movement had to face internal conflicts, burning out of the members, fragmentation of interest and problems with decision-making and communication. The methods of decision-making brought from other European movements have not worked properly in the local context. In this paper we are going to describe the rise and fall of OKUPÉ, giving special emphasis to the possible reasons for the latter. We are arguing that in the specific context of academia, where conflicts may be perceived as beneficial for its members, balance – that is, avoiding opponents and meeting friends – is often not sought, which suggests that balance theory may not have an explanatory power in this particular case.

Introduction

Recent years have been very active for student movements in Europe. Many universities have been occupied and numerous student movements appeared as response to the Bologna Process and reforms commercialising higher education (Ovetz 1996, Baćević 2010). Universities have gone through neo-liberal changes and student social movements should be analysed in relation to the organisational structure of universities within which they operate. At the same time, it has been argued that contemporary students identify with broader social issues, because higher education has become a target for widespread austerity measures (Sotiris 2010, Younis 2011, Hopkins Todd 2011) and because students have lost their special "elite" status and have more in common with the rest of society (Zugman 2005).

Still, such an explanation of student activism, that is, through showing their interests, in accordance with the rational choice theory, cannot alone explain changes in students' involvement in activism, so there have been some attempts to improve the theory, e.g. by treating activism as a learning process, where individual interests change through interactions (Kim Bearman 1997). There is also a growing interest in rituals (Oxlund 2010) and the role of emotions in student activism (Yang 2005, Wettergren 2009). Still, mostly positive, if not euphoric emotional events have been analysed, while as we will argue, negative emotions appearing in movements also shape them and are crucial in analysing their life-cycle.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss a movement formed at the University of Gdańsk in Poland, called OKUPÉ (Otwarty Komitet Uwalniania Przestrzeni Edukacyjnych – Open Committee for the Liberation of Educational Spaces). The movement could be treated as a part of the International Student Movement against commercialisation of education, but it has also had its distinct characteristics, goals, mobilisation frames, and outcomes. It consisted mostly of PhD students, but also of other groups at the university and in the local

community. In this paper we are going to show OKUPÉ in a global and national context and then describe it in more details, analysing also its life-cycle from mobilization to its current latency state. We are going to focus on the reasons for the group's formation, as well as on the possible reasons for the current lack of activity. We hope that by doing this we can contribute not only to academic knowledge about social movements, but we can also show potential pitfalls to other social movements, particularly university movements.

Student movements in Poland

Researchers (Piotrowski 2009, Rose-Ackerman 2005, Petrova and Tarrow 2007) have been pointing to a low level of engagement in contentious politics in Poland, as well as in other Central and Eastern European countries. This should not be mistaken for the development of the third sector, with many NGOs being established and building alliances with each other (Petrova and Tarrow 2007). Here, we are basing on Żuk's (2001) differentiation between the third sector, that is, organisations with a narrow scope of interest, which work as a part of the existing political system, usually as NGOs; and the fourth sector, that is, social movements that have a broader scope of interest and want to "change the rules of the game" (Żuk 2001, 119). This difference was considered crucial by social movement participants, interviewed by Żuk (2001) and Piotrowski (2009), even though attitudes to both sectors varied.

The low level of engagement in protests and activism in Poland has been attributed to several factors. One of them is the high precarity of the labour market, low social security and low salaries, which makes young people work long hours and prevents them from engaging time in social movements (Rose-Ackerman 2005, Żakowski 2011). In the case of students, spending much time working is especially characteristic for Poland, where students who do not rely on their family support spend the highest in the EU number of hours working, and the overall students' time budget (studying plus working hours) is particularly high (Orr Gwosć Netz 2011). Another factor is the low public support for violent protests – as Rose-Ackerman puts it "most people in Central Europe would never join an unlawful strike or occupy a building" (2005, 27). This low support for contentious politics can also be connected with a generational shift that happened in social movements in Poland after 1989, which resulted in considering protests as something for the rebellious youth. Piotrowski describes it in the following way:

> "[B]ecause the new sphere [of activism] was created mostly by young people, the size of it was much smaller, especially after the transformation, when many former dissidents became the new elites or moved to businesses. This kind of generational gap on the one hand stigmatizes the alternative movement as connected to youth (sub)culture, and on the other hand might result in its smaller (compared to Western countries) size. Also, with the shift of the elites, many parts of the society became obsolete for the new elites, or at least they lost their representation, with the best examples of the workers and Solidarność movement. With 'cultural anticommunism' dominating the mainstream

political discourse, the rise of the left-leaning groups was difficult, so some parts of these abandoned groups were 'managed' by the radical right and populist parties and groups." (2009, 186)

Piotrowski points here to another very important factor, that is, condemnation of all leftist ideas as "socialist" or "communist" in the mainstream discourse. Żakowski (2011) has also argued that most members of the Polish society compare the current situation only with the communist past, and are, therefore, relatively content with it. Leftist movements are, thus, portrayed as a threat of coming back to the grim communist times.

Furthermore, researchers have also pointed to the disappointment of Polish citizens with parliamentary politics, resulting not in appearance of social movements leading to political change, but — on the contrary — to withdrawal from the public life and all political activity (Rose-Ackerman 2005, Zielińska 2012).

Still, even with all these above mentioned factors in mind, one will notice that political protests do happen in Poland. Recently (early 2012) mass demonstrations united Poles from a broad political spectrum against the ACTA agreement[2] which could potentially limit one's ability to download music and videos from the Internet. The frame of the protest, that is, addressing potential limitations to freedom, was well-rooted in the anti-communist past, and thus, aligned with right-wing movements, and at the same time it was in accordance with more anarchistic views. This coalition of enemies was only possible due to the limited demands. Thus, the protest did not connect to other social issues (Bendyk 2012). Such a situation of seeking broad alliances was initially present in the student movement we are going to describe and, arguably, has become the reason for its downfall.

When we look historically at student protests in Poland, it is important to mention student protests in March 1968, which were brutally suppressed, causing silencing of students for many years (Górski 2009). In terms of student organisations that operated before 1989, two main ones need to be noticed. One of them was ZSP (Association of Polish Students), which started in the 1950's, and worked between 1973 and 1982 with their name changed to SZSP, that is, the Socialist Association of Polish Students (Rose-Ackerman 2005). The organisation was closely linked to the political regime and membership in it gave tangible benefits to students, so it was very far from being a social movement. The other organisation, NZS (Independent Students' Association), was a part of the political opposition. Rose-Ackerman summarises its beginning in the following way:

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[2] The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement [ACTA] is a controversial multinational treaty concerning intellectual property rights.

Interface: a journal for and about social movements   *Article*
Volume 4 (1): 327 - 359 (May 2012)   *Prusinowska, Kowzan, Zielińska,*
Struggling to unite

"[NZS] began as a mass movement among students in September 1980 just after the strikes in Gdańsk. It was legalized in February 1981 after some strikes by students. According to Witold Repetowicz, a leader in the 1990s, some of the original leaders of NZS were also low-level members of ZSP. NZS grew out of earlier free student associations, some connected with Solidarity. For example, in Kraków there was a Student Committee of Solidarity in the second half of the 1970s, and in 1979 a national group existed called the Movement of Young Poland (Ruch Młodej Polski). In the fall of 1980, students lined up to join the organization; at that time, it was a true mass movement that supported the ideals of Solidarity without a formal association. Nevertheless, Repetowicz points out that even at that early time it struggled over whether to be a students' labor union or a more broadly political organization." (197)

Even though NZS could be called a mass student movement, Żuk argues that more radically oriented cultural and political activists in the 1990's perceived it as an example of canalising resistance, and, thus, as a negative point of reference (2001). As a result, "Western" movements, especially French ones, became a model for Polish radical movements of the 1990's, and not Polish movements from before 1989 (Żuk 2001). Both ZSP and NSZ have lost most of their support after 1989 and are now involved mostly with cultural activities, while some individuals use membership in these organisations as a stepping stone toward a political career (Rose-Ackerman 2005, ZSP 12.05.2010).

As Gill and DeFronzo (2009) indicate, referring to Nella Van Dyke's research, one factor determining appearance of student protests is tradition of political activism at a particular university, but on the condition that such activism subculture was maintained and could facilitate new outbreaks of resistance. After 1989, student movements were almost non-existent in Poland (Żuk 2001), for reasons described before, and even the few ones that existed, such as the one we will analyse in this paper, did not refer to traditions from 1980's, even though its participants had been aware of them, some had even done research in this field. However, the tradition of Solidarity was not maintained and did not change into contemporary student activism. One explanation of why it was so, is the shift of many former dissidents into elites (Piotrowski 2009). Another is that, according to David Ost (2007) and Żuk (2001), Solidarity moved from the class discourse into identity issues – economic conflicts were transformed into conflicts on who is "a real member of the community" and previous leaders of the Solidarity movement (now in the establishment) strongly opposed the class politics (Ost 2007, 378).

Such an approach could make it difficult to mobilise new generations of students, especially when the contemporary student movements are becoming "university movements", which are built around work issues, with precariat emerging as a new class. Moreover, student movements being part or using repertoire of "alternative culture" (streetart, flashmobs etc.), similarly as in 1960s (Hanna 2008), risk being rejected because of broadened distance to older generations and "serious" groups of society – including former social movement members. To sum up, the Solidarity tradition, together with students' protest of 1980s in Gdańsk, were transformed into a petrified symbol, which is celebrated in rituals of "high culture of protest", as we call it, that is, through official galas

and formal meetings with the authorities, rather than through a continuous struggle. Thus, even in Gdańsk, their legend has been "fossilized", that is, put into history coursebooks and safely celebrated as a part of local history, rather than a source of inspiration.

Methodological framework

The authors of this paper were members[3] and co-founders of the movement in Gdańsk. We have engaged a lot of time and emotions into the movement and, thus, we are now facing a difficult task of trying to look at it from a distance and evaluate our actions. The perspective from which this paper was prepared joins our experience as activists and researchers. However, the research was not planned at the beginning of the movement. Although we were engaged, together with other members, in constant discussions and informal evaluations of OKUPÉ's activity, there had been no attempt to analyse it in a broader and more rigid academic way and share this analysis with external researchers and activists.

Our involvement in the movement's activity resulted in feelings of trauma and unwillingness to continue actions, and this feeling was shared by some other members as well (more in: Zielińska, Kowzan, Prusinowska 2011). Therefore, after not being active in the movement for a number of months, we decided that an analysis of what had happened and what went wrong, could be both therapeutic for its members and useful for avoiding the same mistakes in the future.

The article will be based on our observation and a content analysis of computer-mediated communication via OKUPÉ's mailing list. At the same time, in the analysis and interpretation of the movement, we will be using both our own post-factum considerations, and the analysis provided by other members in previous discussions within the movement. We found that it is almost impossible to distinguish the two from each other, since discussions have shaped our current understanding of the movement. Thus, OKUPÉ's collective inquires will not only be analysed in this text, but they will also be a tool of this analysis.

Our research methodology is action research with its potentially subversive presumption that researchers can be deeply involved and, thus, facilitate social change, since the whole process of our research intersects "between investigation and political action" (Morell 2009, 21). Although we entered the movement first and foremost as activists, later we have interwoven our experience of being involved in the movement with theoretical reflection. It is our hope that this text balances both activist approach and the aforementioned theoretical perspectives.

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[3] In this article we will use the word "member" as a synonym of "participant", even though there was no official membership in the movement and no formal structure. People who joined the mailing list will be considered members in this article.

The International Student Movement

 From the historical perspective, international networks were present in the student movements of the 1960s and they were an essential factor supporting mobilisation (Klimke and Scharloth 2008). In this respect, OKUPÉ can be treated as a part of an initiative called the International Student Movement (ISM). ISM has been formed as an independent platform uniting groups struggling for free and emancipatory education. OKUPÉ's participation in ISM was neither tight nor permanent, but as in the case of the 1968 movements' transnational network, it ensured "rapid spread and mixture of new forms and tactics of protest [and] formed a widespread resource for mobilization" (Klimke and Scharloth 2008, 5). In fact, this was one of the reasons for joining ISM, considering scarcity of visible student protests at the University of Gdańsk and in Poland as a whole. By joining ISM, OKUPÉ could frame its actions as a part of a global struggle.

The first big event of the ISM network – "International Day of Action against the Commercialization of Education" (5/11/2008) was a series of coordinated protests in over 25 countries around the world (ISM 2008). Although Poland was not among these countries, information about ISM reached Polish activists and some groups were formed, as we will describe later.

The second wave of ISM's protests was characterised by massive demonstrations and occupations (especially in Spain, Germany, Croatia and the USA). The choice of methods (e.g. occupations of university parliaments and boards' meetings) indicates problems with democratic procedures at universities – there had been no space for students' participation in decision-making processes. The issue of democratisation of university and society has been one of the demands, just like in protests of 1968 (Gassert 2008). At the same time, methods used against students, including violent police repressions of many groups (ISM 2009a), strengthened international support for ISM initiatives.

The main goal of the international network was to support groups involved in it, by spreading information about the protests (as the information was often marginalized, misrepresented or even omitted in the mainstream media) and encouraging the international community to unite, e.g., to send solidarity letters or to plan future actions together.

Student movement initiatives were diverse; they included occupations of universities in e.g. Austria, Germany and Spain. In Croatia the Independent Student Initiative for the Right to Free Education organized a peaceful occupation of the Faculty of Philosophy – this protest spread to other cities, lasted for 35 days and gained support from the international community (e.g. through an online petition), including Noam Chomsky, Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler (OKUPÉ, 3.05.2009). The educational context of this protest is especially visible, as students have organized alternative lectures, film screenings and workshops instead of formal classes (ISM 2009).

The origins of OKUPÉ

In Polish university cities, such as Gdańsk and Wrocław, activists involved in other social movements heard about ISM and the struggle in other countries, but there was no organisation oriented towards change in the educational system and institutions ready to join the international protests. To illustrate the situation we can refer to a radio interview with activists from Wrocław – one of them stated that he was waiting for a group to start "a branch" in Poland, but as no such thing had happened, he started to organise a new group for this purpose (Altergodzina, 06.05.2009). A similar process of using the political opportunity created by ISM took place in Gdańsk. Although the situation of higher education was not the same in Poland and in other countries (no reform was announced in Poland at that time), activists felt that the international attention and cooperation could help changing the existing conditions of studying and working at universities.

At the University of Gdańsk the resistance was triggered by a number of issues, such as lack of scholarships for PhD students, who were the main initiators of the movement. Due to insufficient information at the application process, many students learned that there were no scholarships only after they had been accepted to the programme. Their disappointment and feeling of deprivation was one of the main reasons for starting the movement and mobilising academia to act for change. In other words, the starting point for this movement in Gdansk was a particular interest of one group pointing at deteriorating conditions of doing research at the university, which formed a platform for collecting other grievances – from students, staff and even graduates.

During conversations between activists in Gdańsk, it was decided that there was a need for an active and open organisation empowering students' voices and articulating grievances, in particular against the security policy at the university (an increasing number of cameras inside buildings, fencing of the previously open campus, and security guards controlling everybody who entered the library) and lack of satisfactory terms of student participation in decision-making processes. The name was chosen before the meeting, during a process of consensus decision-making among PhD students and it was supposed to both convey the message about a need to liberate educational spaces (from corporations, surveillance etc.), but also – due to the sound of the contraction – to trigger occupations[4], which were a common ISM tactic in Europe at this time.

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[4] Ironically, the most accurate Polish translation of the word "occupations" (that is, reflecting its double meaning: a job and taking control) is "zajęcia", which in fact is the same term used for describing usual lectures and daily courses at the university.

Picture: Małgorzata Zielinska

A recently built fence around the university was chosen to be the most important and urgent issue, as it meant for OKUPÉ's members not only a practical problem of crossing the university's territory, but also a symbolic closing of the university for outsiders and joining the growing number of gated communities. Spontaneously, the demand to liberate the university space (from the fence and in general) — started to be treated as an "empty signifier", joining demands of different groups into one nodal point (Laclau 2005) and, thus, helping to build a chain of equivalence between particular interests, in Laclau's words, or, to put it bluntly, a collection of equivalent demands. Laclau's theory explains how different social movements with a variety of demands can build hegemony by establishing one demand, as long as it has a component abstract enough to represent every single demand. The theory was in use for the first time three days after the first open meeting of OKUPÉ. Even though it was employed by one activist to understand the organisation itself, it helped to conceptualise the issue of the fence later.

Our chain of equivalence started to be negotiated after a call for the first meeting in form of a poster addressing two problems: of the fence and of the library, and suggesting (by asking to bring sheets for banners) that action should be taken. The call was hung on noticeboards at the university. At the first meeting, on March 11, 2009, around 50 people came. The issues of the fence

and the library control were widely recognised as a symptom of the university's condition and there was a heated discussion about everything else that should be changed at the university. Problems mentioned included the organizational structure, student-teacher relations, gender discrimination, as well as the above mentioned security measures at the university.

What is interesting, the Bologna Process, which was criticized in most other European movements, was not of major concern for OKUPÉ (although there were some attempts to utilise this frame in the Gdańsk movement), since it had different consequences for Poland than for other countries – it brought more international mobility and not fees, which had already been there for some students (at private universities or for part-time students; Kowzan 2009). Only while trying to unite with ISM, did OKUPÉ try to extend its frames and focused on the commercialisation of education and the new higher education reform plans of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. These were published shortly after the formation of OKUPÉ and just before the international "Reclaim your Education – Global Week of Action" (20-29/4/2009), which groups from Polish universities, including OKUPÉ decided to join. In Gdańsk, the main actions during that week were an open discussion, a demonstration during the Minister's visit and producing T-shirts related to our claims.

Student Soviets or Student Unions - why had Polish universities been free from activism?

It has been argued that "the formal aspect of student representation [in higher education governance] has largely been settled" (Bergan 2003, 4) in Europe and it can be seen as an outcome of the student revolt of 1968. Student unions, which in many countries are often considered an obstacle for student political activity (since they are more occupied with business than political representation of interests; Swain 2011), in Poland do not actually exist, which is – paradoxically – the basic obstacle for students' independent political activity as well. In order to show why the grievances in Gdańsk were not addressed to official democratically chosen decision-making bodies, it is essential to mention characteristics of the Polish university self-government system.

Firstly, student self-government includes all bachelor and master level students, while PhD students form a separate body. Formally, both bodies enjoy some level of autonomy within the university. Secondly, in Poland, student councils (elected representation of student self-government, i.e., of all students at the university), whose name refers to "soviets", are not unions, that is, they are not formally acknowledged organisations with membership open to all students, with independent budget based on membership fees. Moreover, councils do not represent other student organisations and have limited autonomy and influence. Additionally, there is no possibility for students at any level of education to form separate trade unions, as the Ministry of Science and Higher Education stated in response to our PhD Student Council's inquiry.

Therefore, there are formal features which need to be taken into account when analysing Polish student movements, such as the fact that all the funding of their official representation (councils) depends on the university administration. There is no membership fee for students and, as a result, neither student nor PhD student councils have independent resources. Thus, students in Poland usually do not have their own media on campuses and in case of protests, there are no "student resources" to use or claim back from unions. Such resources could be a good starting point for any student movement, as even the cost of printing some posters may be quite an obstacle when no money has been collected. The councils themselves are elements of formal administration with particular set of competencies and they are bound by administrative procedures. They do not control any institutions strategically important for students, such as bookshops, cafeterias, housing, printing facilities etc. The main field of councils' activity is production of documents — applications, proposals, opinions — and sending representatives to collective bodies of university administration (Kowzan and Krzymiński 2011). Therefore, they are rarely perceived as an effective body for dealing with problematic issues or for taking decisive actions. Moreover, the paradigm of student politics all over Europe is to avoid conflicts, and to keep contentious social issues away from the campuses (Bergan 2003).

What is more, at the University of Gdańsk, and in other European universities, student councils tend not to attract much attention. Issues concerning individual campuses shape the field of students' political battles, which, together with the growing temporality of students' stay at these places, may explain why participation in student election is low in Europe, i.e. far less than half of student population choose their representatives (Bergan 2003, Klemenčič 2011). A measurable index of students' (non)involvement and, subsequently, the lack of legitimisation for councils, is the attendance rate in student councils elections. In 2010 at the Faculty of Languages (where recruitment limit for PhD studies that year was 80 people; Kowzan and Krzymiński 2011) only two PhD students voted in the election to the Faculty PhD Student Council. As far as BA and MA students are concerned, a survey conducted in 2009 showed that only 13% of those questioned have participated in election that year or the year before (dlaStudenta.pl 2009). Data presented here apply to elections conducted after the formation of OKUPÉ, however, as they reflect a general situation — we use them to sketch the background in which our group had been formed.

To summarize, neither the PhD Student Council nor BA and MA student councils were structures which could have enabled activists to mobilize resources other than provided by the administration or the university community in general. Nevertheless, thanks to the PhD Student Council at the Faculty of Social Sciences', some improvements were introduced, for example doctoral scholarships. This was done in cooperation with OKUPÉ - one

organisation provided the official means of pressure on the authorities, while the other escalated the conflict and forced authorities to some reaction.[5]

Demographics of the movement

As it has already been mentioned, student protests in Poland after the political and economic transformations have been almost non-existent (Żuk 2001). There may be many reasons to this, such as lack of time due to working apart of studying. What is more, following the Bologna Process, the previously five-year studies in Poland have been divided into three-year Bachelor studies and two-year Master studies. Therefore, students spend relatively less time at the university and their willingness to invest time in its change might decrease. Students who spend the longest time – four years and more – at the university, are PhD students. Also this group experiences the strongest relative deprivation comparing to the previous way of doing a PhD, that is, being employed at the university. Nowadays, many PhD students in Poland do not receive any scholarship or any form of payment for their research (Kaczmar 2009, SDUW 2009). Most of them also do not have the opportunity to earn by teaching at the university, while many are told to teach there for free.

It is therefore probably not surprising that PhD students formed a big part of both OKUPÉ and other student movements in Poland in 2009 (though OKUPÉ consisted also of BA and Master students, as well as academic teachers and some graduates of the university). Interestingly, some Polish activists have applied to PhD studies after being their involvement in OKUPÉ and other Polish movements. What is more, PhD students in Poland are generally in the same age as students of the last years of studies in Germany, where they tend to "graduate in their late twenties" (Morgan 2009). This may also explain the movement's composition in Poland.

Thinking about what activists at universities in Gdańsk and across Poland have in common, we found that there is a noticeable number of former Erasmus exchange students among them, unlike general numbers of graduates with this experience – less than 4% (EC 2010). During discussions about university reforms, these students often referred to other European countries (mainly Scandinavian ones) as examples, whereas administration officers referred only to policies implemented by the University of Warsaw or American universities.

In terms of gender, the composition of the movement was rather equal and both women and men were active during discussions. The majority of OKUPÉ's activists were associated with social sciences, but it is worth noticing that in other cities in Poland, PhD students from natural sciences appeared to be more radical (Compare: Kaczmar 2009). Also, the main actors in Polish movements

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[5] Such utilisation of the PhD student council in order to support a non-formal organisation and its more radical actions bears some resemblance to the Situationist Interantional's [SI] history (Hecken and Grzenia, 2008). References to SI and taking over the councils with their resources made even an inside joke in OKUPÉ.

were students enrolled in full-time programmes at public universities and not the ones who needed to pay for their studies (weekend students and students at private higher education institutions). It is difficult to say exactly why it was so, but possible explanations include less spare time – as such students would often work during the week and study from Friday to Sunday – and being more accustomed to treating education not as a common good but as a service similar to other services one needs to pay for. Using Albert Hirschman's theory of exit and voice (1970) we can also assume that in the market logic introduced by university fees, it is more natural to exit an institution, if one is not satisfied with it, than to speak out and try to change it.

The structure of the movement

In contrast to mass student movements from the 20th century, contemporary social movements at universities try to organise themselves in a leaderless way, often inspired by the Zapatista movement (Zugman 2005, Juris and Pleyers 2009), which makes them more immune to co-optation of their members by political parties (della Porta Diani 1999, Johnston 2010). Also the movement in Gdańsk was based on the idea of horizontalism, consensus decision-making, together with forming working groups for particular issues. Two of the co-founders had taken part in consensus decision-making during European activist camps – called Ecotopia. The process seemed to them to work very well for big groups and, therefore, was introduced as a way of decision-making for OKUPÉ.

Thus, this intentional act of "borrowing" the idea of consensus can serve as an example of a frame diffusion process. The frame of consensus was not tailored to fit the host culture, because it was not considered culture-dependent, since it seemed to work well on the international level. Also sign language and a facilitation method learned at the camps were to be used at bigger meetings. It was also decided that every issue which members found important to focus on, would be dealt with by a separate working group, consisting of those interested in this particular problem. After the first meeting, five groups focusing on particular issues were formed, along with six other groups focusing more on their preferred working methods, e.g. a graphic group or a filming group. It was also suggested that between meetings everything would be decided at an online mailing list. It appeared later that big group meetings were rare (only two), working group meetings did not necessarily bring their findings back to the rest of the group, while the mailing list was the main arena for decision-making.

OKUPÉ also faced problems with finding local political alliances. Due to the group's diverse goals and ideological backgrounds, finding an alliance acceptable for all members was problematic, and as a result only two actions were openly conducted in cooperation with other organizations, such as one with a local branch of a country-wide leftist organisation, Krytyka Polityczna.

OKUPÉ's actions

During the first months (March-May 2009) many single actions were taken, some resulted in success, some in awakening public discussions, while some did not result in any significant or anticipated changes. Besides action at the university or in the public, such as demonstrations, flash mobs, happenings and petitions, as well as negotiations with authorities, a lot of effort was also devoted to researching the situation — finding out what students and the local community felt about particular problems (by surveys, interviews, films and studying fora), studying possibilities for change (such as a survey among library staff), as well as reasons for particular decisions (about the fence, surveillance cameras, etc.) and possibilities of support from the university staff. The latter was an effort to "study up" (Latour 2005, 98), that is, to produce knowledge about academia, about actions of people with "cultural capital" much higher than ours, which is quite a unique situation in social sciences, though common for collective action research exploring their own territory (Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias 2007, 113). The process was collective and involved many movement's participants. Some did their own research and shared it at the mailing list, others went in groups to do interviews.

It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss and evaluate all the actions, thus we are presenting a table with a brief description of main actions.

Issue	**Actions**	**Results**
Fencing the previously open campus	an open letter to the rector + a discussion panel + a clandestine direct action + a film + interviews in the media	no changes with the fence; discussion at the university and in media
Police-like **control** in the library	research + petition + meetings with the administration	some changes introduced by the administration
Lack of **scholarships** for PhD students	a flash mob + T-shirts with slogans + letters from the PhD student council to the dean	a growing number of yearly scholarships for PhD students at the Faculty of Social Sciences, granted based on performance.

Cameras at the university and over-reactive university police	fake cameras installed	no changes, minor repressions of the members of the movement
New reforms — growing **commercialisation** of public universities	demonstrations, banners, discussions, T-shirts with slogans	difficult to evaluate
Solidarity with other movements	solidarity letters + meetings/conferences + coordinated film screenings	some degree of unity, an attempt to form a new organization on the national level
Cars parked on the grass and sidewalks at the campus	discussion with the rector	university guards dealing with the problem
Autonomy of the university vs. police control at the campus	letter to the rector, legal research, individual interventions (asking police officers to leave the campus)	more awareness among activists about the autonomy at the university

Table 1, OKUPÉ's actions. Own elaboration

During the summer holidays of 2009 OKUPÉ's members travelled and seized to be active. A couple of activists went to study or work abroad and did not come back after the holidays. One of the attempts to overcome the "holiday crisis" was a project initially called The National Education Congress (Narodowy Kongres Edukacji), suggested by a group of members. The idea behind it was to use a rule from the Polish Constitution stating that "Supreme power in the Republic of Poland shall be vested in the Nation" (The Constitution of the Republic of Poland 1997) in defense of free education for all, in form of a congress consisting of delegates from the whole country, However, the idea and it's scope did not gain support from other members of OKUPÉ. The most heated discussion was about the name of the project — the National Education Congress — which introduced a narrow ethnic perspective[6] in the eyes of many members.

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[6]The understanding of the word nation in Polish differs from its English or French understanding. Due to the partitions of the country in the 19th century, the meaning of the word

The consensus decision-making was a long process , and it resulted in a new name – The Common Education Congress (Powszechny Kongres Edukacji). But as the conflict revealed big differences in understanding ethnic diversity, which constituted a strong part of some members' ideology and identity, there was no will to cooperate in this project, and the will to cooperate in other actions decreased. Although it was proposed that the initiators would carry it out on their own, other members did not want the name of OKUPÉ to be associated with it.

The process of monitoring changes at the university continued, but mostly in form of informing one another about them. There were also other actions in 2010 and 2011, but they were sporadic or undertaken by individuals who used the name of the movement without asking for other activists' consent. In 2011, after a long period of latency, OKUPÉ's online action (a Facebook event) attracted attention of many students and the local media. However, even though some members opted for broadening the actions and organising a series of 'real-life' events, this did not gain enough support or enthusiasm in the group and no other action followed.

The fall of the movement

In the beginning, the movement in Gdańsk had approximately 50 members at the mailing list. In April 2011, 37 people were still there. The decrease in numbers is not significant but some of the most active members including those who were focused mostly on feminist issues, left the group or stayed only as observers. Most of the people who left were dissatisfied with the discussion online, which included aggressive comments, sarcasm and many conflicts about the goals of OKUPÉ.

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shifted from "the citizens of the state" to people of ethnic Polish origin, speaking the same language. Nowadays, using this word may suggest exclusion of ethnic and national minorities living in Poland.
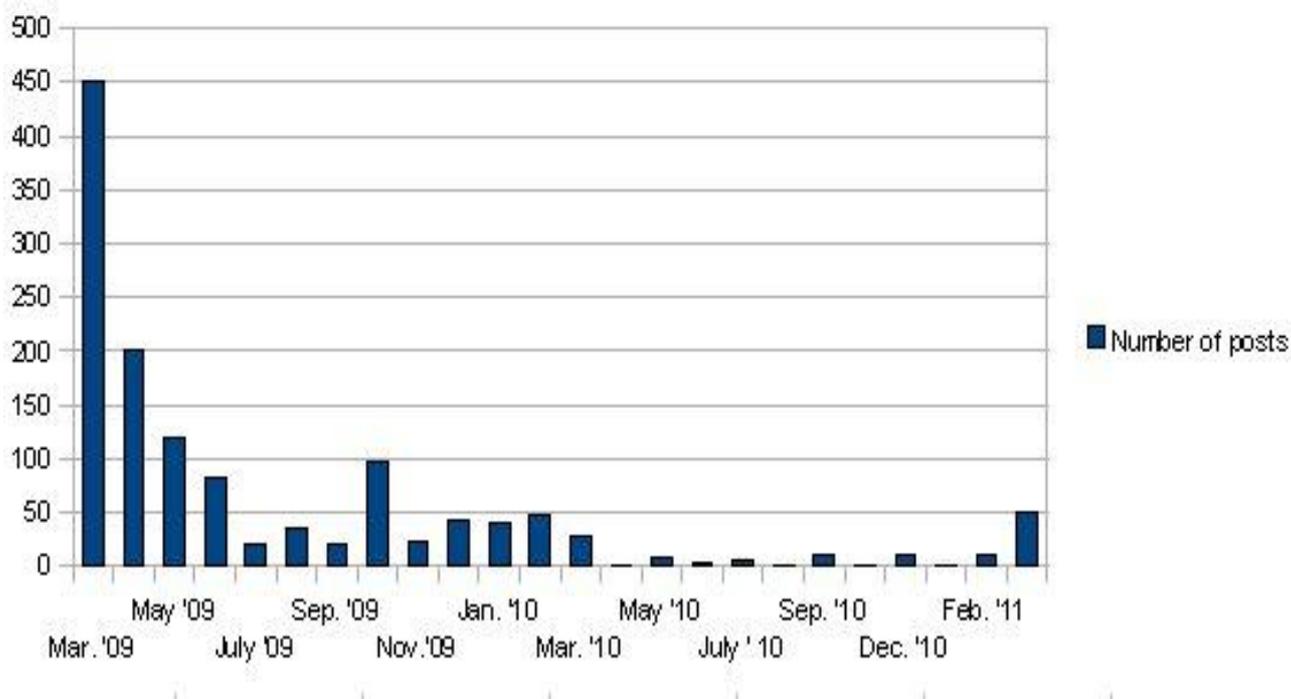
Graph 1, Number of posts per month in the OKUPÉ discussion group, from March 2009 to March 2011. Own elaboration

Also, as mentioned earlier, the group's activity – both online and in terms of real actions – decreased with time. People were active at the beginning but the first enthusiasm dropped at the end of the academic year. The next academic year (2009/2010) in October there were efforts to start actions again, but this time focused mostly on protesting against higher education reforms. Even these did not attract much attention of the "old" participants, while no new members were recruited. Although there were several calls for promoting OKUPÉ at the university and recruiting new members, hardly any actions were taken, as the enthusiasm had already been gone. The reason for a decrease in activities of the movement can be explained by the so called summer holiday crisis, which is usually the main threat for student activism, because the engagement is rarely sustained for more than one academic year (Altbach 1989, 99). It takes several months to reproduce movements' resources after the break, because of the outflow of more experienced students from academia and the inflow of newcomers. Below, we will try to list other factors possibly contributing to the decline in the movement's activity.

Repressed without repressions

OKUPÉ's actions have led to heated discussions at local fora and media. Many people supported the actions, almost 700 students signed a petition for changes in the library, but there was also criticism both from academia and from the general public. Some fellow PhD students were outraged that OKUPÉ was

destroying the brand of their studies and their elite image. Both people of the public and some other students were claiming that students should be grateful for the opportunity to study for free and should treat authorities with much more respect, including wearing formal suits while meeting the rector. However, framing higher education as an institution for elites was incompatible with the movement's frames.

Other members of academia were treating OKUPÉ as a collector of their complains. Thus, OKUPÉ faced the problem of "free riders". Instead of joining the movement or being mobilised to do something on their own, people came to OKUPÉ with suggestions of what the group should rather do instead of the actions taken. Others were asking us to act in cases that they found important but did not want to risk their position at the university to fight for.

Another problem was that unlike the members of OKUPÉ, who decided to treat the university as a place of their own and express their voice, many other students were treating it as a very temporal place, not worth investing their time in. This was shown in a film in which a member of OKUPÉ interviewed other students (Emeschajmer 2009).

As we have already mentioned, OKUPÉ did not refer to student movements in the 80's and there was a clear generational gap between members of both movements. OKUPÉ's actions were ridiculed in the media and by some members of the academic community even in the "cradle" of the Solidarity movement and Polish contemporary democracy. Since the majority of OKUPÉ's actions were focused on local campus issues and they only once openly targeted the national government, they were not considered political by the older generation of academics, whose expectations for student political participation were the result of experience of old social movements.

The misunderstanding can also be explained by a difference between old type of movements such as Solidarity, which were focused on expansion of "rights", and new social movements, which focus on expansion of "autonomy" instead (Katsiaficas 2006, 380). As we mentioned earlier, Laclau's and Mouffe's theory of hegemony became a reference point for OKUPÉ and liberating space (especially from the fence surrounding the campus) was chosen as a common denominator – an "empty signifier". The authorities broke the chain of equivalence by deciding to process different demands separately. As a result, hopes vested in the dialogue effectively blocked the mobilisation of resources. When most of the hopes failed, deprived of influx of new members and burnt out activists dispersed.

Problems and conflicts in OKUPÉ: 3 cases

One of the characteristics of what we were doing together in 2009 was unpredictability. The energy during meetings, discussions interplaying with actions and reactions that we provoked with the movement were beyond so-called human agency – one action resulted in another and went beyond the control of individual members. It was enough to mention "another injustice"

during the meeting and immediately this issue was on the agenda and something was planned to solve the problem. Despite the feeling of enormous power to act in the world around us, we were helpless facing some inner dynamics of the movement, which had been shaken and divided by several splits.

By presenting a detailed description of inner conflicts we would like to shed light on "deliberative, utilitarian and goal directed" (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 624) processes of choosing interpretative frames by the movement. Opp suggested (2009, 250) that rational choice theory could be used to analyse such strategic processes. However, in the OKUPÉ's case, costs and benefits of articulating movement's frames to unmobilised individuals were rarely calculated. Instead, the strategic processes themselves have been reduced to minimum, due to the costs of conflicts in a specific environment of the mailing lists.

The first conflict concerned gender equality issues. At the first meeting, the problem of women discrimination at the university was raised and a working group called "Equality group" was formed. Proposed forms of action included researching the scale of the problem and lobbying for establishing a position of a university equality officer. Due to the structure of communication in OKUPÉ, the initial discussions happened at the common mailing list, open for all members and without banning procedures. The "equality discussion" included 65 e-mails by 12 people (5 men and 7 women) in only 5 days (13-17.03.2009).

At the beginning, one female member suggested to broaden the group's goals and fight against all kind of discrimination at the campus. When one man supported this idea attacking at the same time what he perceived as a "narrow" feminist perspective, his choice of wording angered three women and a longer discussion followed. Some women opted for focusing only on women discrimination as the most important and the most common problem, while other members argued that dealing with ethnic, racial, religious or other types of discrimination was equally significant and one could address all of them at the same time. Finally, when somebody posted a law regarding the national government's Representative for Equal Status of Men and Women, which addressed diverse types of discrimination, others agreed that they should opt for such a position to be established on the university level.

However, the discussion continued, since one male member started inquiring about the limits of what could be called discrimination and what could not, giving an example of a male football team refusing to include women in the club. Such an attempt to define boundaries of someone's demand, even if conducted in a good will, may cause tensions in a group. Thus, it is an example of "friendly fire" - a term employed to describe situations when "primarily male actors [...] are both help and hindrance to feminist strategizing" (Taylor 1998, 687). Two female members felt that this post was meant to ridicule their actions and ridiculed its author in their posts as a consequence. One participant without long academic background attacked him using vulgar words and short aggressive messages. A series of mutual personal attacks and accusations of

fascism followed, even though other members asked for ending the conflict. The discussion stopped after the next face-to-face meeting where goals and methods were discussed again and the main initiators of the group's actions decided it would be easier to move the project to a feminist organisation they were part of, so as to avoid conflicts over their values.

At the end of the discussion three of its participants complained that the medium – online discussions – provoked misconstruction of one's ideas, which caused unnecessary conflicts. At the same time scheduling of meetings proved to be long, since everybody was busy with their work and other projects, so online discussions were treated as an important activity between "real" meetings.

Another example of frame alignment was the issue of ecology at the university, also discussed at the mailing list. There were 52 e-mails sent in this thread during 4 days (19-22.03.2009). 12 people took part in the discussion, during which 3 other left the mailing list. It started with a few demands: ranging from adjusting the new campus to the needs of people who walk or bike; organising a campaign to recycle waste; to demanding vegetarian and vegan meals in canteens. At the beginning, the number of demands was growing and they even became more radical, e.g., a demand that all new buildings on the campus should become energetically passive.

After several e-mails, there was one voice claiming that car drivers were not solely responsible for parking their cars on pathways, but professors' parking privileges together with fees at the parking place had caused the problem. This started an emotional discussion about cars, which revealed that for two activists being a driver was a question of identity. The interpretation of the general goal of the movement - stated in its name – "the liberation of educational spaces" was questioned too, which revealed its ambiguous meaning. The term liberation had attracted those who wanted to liberate campus e.g. from cars and those who were rather against regulations. Discussion at this stage has also shown that consensus and compromise where often understood interchangeably and were both opposed to "thinking the same". Its understanding was therefore different than in many other social movements (Graeber 2004) and instead of meaning unanimity and the agreement of all, it meant for many members compromising one's ideas.

An ironic opposition between "the radical, extremist and fundamentalist" bikers and "tax-paying, over-worked and busy" drivers has been established in this thread. It was ironic, because in parallel discussions on the list, words related to fighting, such as "militants" were used in order to achieve reconciliation. At some point, a few activists withdrew some of their demands saying that they could achieve their goals outside this movement, which implies that some analysis of costs and benefits was undertaken by them. There was also an attempt from the drivers' side to bypass the conflict around cars through a proposal to focus on something else, i.e., on planting trees. However, a careless use of words which suggested antisemitism of the person, who started the discussion about planting trees, prevented any action points.

The final and the only result of this emotional discussion was incorporating 3 ecological demands into the manifesto, which, however, has never been published, because the process of collecting and negotiating all demands lasted longer than OKUPÉ's capability to mobilise people to struggle for these demands.

The "ecological" thread turned to be a discussion about identity, and probably that is the reason why people often felt attacked. Careless use of words was too visible to ignore and forget, unlike face-to-face conversations.

Finally, the third most discussed topic and the only frame which survived the strategic process of frame alignment was the fence. This issue appeared frequently in all threads on the mailing list. Our general conclusion from the threads revolving around the fence is that – contrary to the aforementioned discussion topics – it did not cause a big conflict between different understandings of concepts, and therefore, actions could follow. In discussions about ecology and equality, the processes of defining hindered transition from dialogue to planing actions. In the discussion concerning the fence, the majority of posts were clearly pragmatic and not ideological.

Negotiating frames and meanings also took place in this discussion, but the importance of dealing with the fence as a legitimate concern for the movement was not questioned. The only cases when the fence's relative importance was disputed was during negotiations about the hierarchy of claims, because in comparison to the fence, other issues were claimed to be marginalised and their supporters wanted to bring this process to attention.

Although discussions were not as aggressive as in other threads, there was also a conflict concerning the fence. This division can be reduced to a simple dichotomy: radical-reformative. It is essential to underline that this conflict did not concern the fence itself. There was a shared assumption that the fence was a problem (or a symptom of more general problems), and therefore deliberations on what was radical or too radical concerned the level of planing actions which should be taken (e.g. destroying or covering the whole fence with fabric). It is precisely at this level that a few unpleasant exchanges of posts happened.

In this context, the problem of online communication was raised, too: a few posts were warning to take into consideration the fact of obstacles in online communication resulting from its form and lack of direct contact. Regardless of a more positive and constructive atmosphere, the discussion did not result in consensus about the mode of further actions: radical or reformative. However, one group who communicated outside the main mailing list conducted a direct action of closing the gates, which went smoothly because of the small size of the group and its unanimity. As a result, externalisation of the demand of an open space was made through action, which had not been decided upon in a consensual way. This suggests that only those frames of the movement are externalised, which are supported by participants who are ready to act in the public.

Reformative vs radical approach

While members of OKUPÉ were trying to understand how the university functions and what causes policy changes in this institution, some of its activists were focusing on blaming particular people behind policies, while others concentrated on undemocratic procedures. With some degree of simplification we can say that the former ones had internalised the Weberian conception of power (compare: Cheater 1999, 6) in which people manipulate each other in the political struggle, where you can either win or lose. At the same time, the latter ones were acting along Foucault's concept of power, where the focus is not on agents, but on the politics of voice. For those seeing politics and power in Weberian terms, empowerment means taking control over resources and Foucault's conception is a dangerous mystification, which blurs the existing corruption and the gender and class-biased structure of power (Cheater 1999). On the other hand, for those who had internalised Foucault's understanding of power, the Weberian thinking is a part of the problem, not the solution, since it reproduces the same patterns of power, even if authorities are replaced by other people.

The dilemma of deciding on radical or reformative character of social movements is an old one. In order to shed some light on this subject, let us refer to a typology of student movements by Jungyun Gill and James DeFronzo (2009). This typology deals with the spectrum of student movements' cultural and structural goals on a scale ranging form moderateness to radicalism, and consists of the following elements: reform student movements, identity radicalism student movements, structural revolutionary student movements and social revolutionary student movements.

According to the authors of this typology, one of the factors playing a role in shaping the profile of a particular student movement is the perception of power and its character (systemic or personal). The personal perspective, which we have called Weberian before, points to reform movements, whereas the systemic perspective – based on Foucault's concept of power – implies revolutionary ones. Gill and DeFronzo (2009) point out that universities have a long history of being the place of revolutionary movements because of their tradition of autonomy, as well as a greater extent of freedom of expression. What is more, especially public educational institutions have been proved to facilitate development of student activism. Taking this into account, it is easier to understand why some activists entering OKUPÉ (as a student movement at a public university) have had big expectations aimed at radical programme and actions.

The ground for reformative aims might be, as Gill and DeFronzo (2009) imply, the experience of successful mobilisation in the past and, generally, a belief that the institution respects democratic rules and ensures space for negotiations. This claim can be supported by the example of OKUPÉ, where some moderate activist had participated in student representative bodies at the university.

In this typology, structural revolutionary movements do not aim at a cultural change either. Instead, they target broad structural changes, for example of the political system. Members of OKUPÉ who could be ascribed to the structural revolutionary category, were interested in ecology and equality issues. The members who were intensively involved in these issues could be perceived as displaying identity radicalism. As Gill and DeFronzo claim, the origins of such activism might be members' personal experience of discrimination and their opinion that discrimination patterns are culturally rooted. In OKUPÉ, this mechanism might have played a role in formation of the feminist fraction within the movement, which could also help to explain such great resistance against this group's claims among other members, who lacked such experiences and beliefs.

The last of the discussed types — the social revolutionary one, focused on both structural and cultural change — was less visible and seemed to be interwoven with the identity radicalism fraction.

To summarize, the flow of online discussions in OKUPÉ seems to support Watler Adamson's claim, made in reference to movements of the left, that focusing on the "revolution-reform" opposition "produces less a confrontation than a mutual isolation of two self-enclosed dialogues" (1978, 429). On OKUPÉ's mailing list, threads involving conflicts over "too radical" or "too moderate" actions ended mostly without decision to take any action at all — everyone simply stepped back to their positions and withdrew from the discussion.

Consensus decision making and its pitfalls

Consensus decision making is a difficult process and needs good facilitation (Graeber 2004, 3). In OKUPÉ, there were both moments of success (such as working together on the name of the group or on parts of the manifesto), but also moments of aggressive conflicts and unwillingness to include the point of view of others. Two of the authors were so tired of the ever-lasting conflicts in the group that they were relieved when they went to study abroad and decided to take a break from activism. At some point, however, they decided to join some meetings of a local Icelandic student movement. They were astonished how smoothly their meetings were going, how the consensus decision-making was implemented without visible problems and how united in their actions the members of the group were. This raised a question — why could there be no unity in OKUPÉ, while it worked in other movements? We will not be able to present here a thorough comparative analysis of the two movements, but some of our suggestions include:

1. A smaller and more ideologically coherent group at the University of Iceland, recruited from people already cooperating in other movements. In Gdańsk, members were mostly leftist — but there were conflicts on the lines of social-democracy vs. libertarianism, such as the conflict about

whether there was a need for regulations or for cooperating with authorities, which persisted in many discussions.

2. Different traditions in regard to consensus decision-making – in Poland there is a history of failure of the consensus-based parliament in the 18th century (the "liberum veto" rule) and it is taught at school as an example of why majority rule is more successful. Other examples of consensus decision making are hardly known in Poland, even among left-wing activists.

3. Strong degree of authoritarianism in Poland (according to Katarzyna Growiec [2009] – the strongest in Europe after Greece), and a strong sense of hierarchy, which results in problems with cooperating in an organization without leaders and a strong structure. Lack of structure and leaders was raised in OKUPÉ's discussion several times as a problem, even by members who associated themselves with anarchist ideology.

OKUPÉ had also some of the features, enumerated by Jane Mansbridge in "Consensus in Context: A Guide for Social Movements" (2003) – that turn consensus decision making into a process with high costs. Members did not have experience with consensus and the group was not homogeneous (e.g. in terms of ideological views), which made decision making more difficult. One of the explanations of the problem with cooperation can be different goals of the group's participants, as well as different values and experiences of its members. There was also a lack of clear rules that one could refer to during conflicts. Some members were referring to the consensus rule, while others where saying it was not important. The idea of consensus decision-making was used in order to enhance the unity of the movement, but it was very difficult to implement, as it appeared that members had different goals and different ideas for the purpose of OKUPÉ. What is more, members did not treat harmony as a higher priority than other values, which according to Mansbridge (2003) has also an impact on the cost of consensus. Here, the particular background of the activists could have had an impact on the members' approach.

Consensus in academia

Discussions in OKUPÉ (both online and face-to-face), even though many times resulted in surprising and satisfactory solutions, proved to be very energy-consuming. One of the reasons may be little experience in facilitating such meetings. Stubbornness of the conflicts indicate some cultural easiness in building "platforms of disagreement", around which stable group coalitions may occur. If we take into consideration that many participants have achieved some kind of educational success, then David Graeber's analysis of academia can be of use. He claims that the culture of consensus is contrary to the organizational culture of contemporary universities (Graeber 2009). He has pointed to cultivating differences and some sectarian attitudes in academia. According to him, this is caused by the academic training, which emphasises how to criticise other academics (Graeber 2009).

In OKUPÉ's discussions, arguments were often long and well developed, and those who participated were usually PhD students or university teachers. Students took part too, but they were sometimes criticized for breaking discussion rules (such as using personal attacks and sarcasm). On the one hand, discussions in OKUPÉ hindered some actions, since they were long and showed the lack of unanimity. On the other hand, they were the goal in themselves – for example, many participants did not believe in the possibility of destroying the fence. They did, however, aim at discussing this issue and being heard, so organising a debate about the fence at the university, as well as in the local media, was considered a success in itself. One member whose comments attracted strong emotions, admitted later in a discussion about the future of OKUPÉ (March, 2010) that for him the movement was an opportunity to train oneself in discussions with people who have completely different opinions. For him the differences were beneficial, while for many others they were obstacles that hindered actions.

Aggressive comments

There was a number of complains against particular individuals' aggressive rhetoric, but there was no rule about how, and if, to exclude members, so as a result of this, the strongest ones survived in the movement, while the ones who were dissatisfied left the group or stayed inactive. There were several attempts to set the rules later, so that the organization could work more easily, but none of them succeeded due to different ideas of particular members. In other words - not everyone would consent to excluding members who were against consensus and who were aggressive, sarcastic or used remarks that could be treated as racist, although their authors claimed they were not. Outside the mailing list, some members were asking for excluding other members, but it was countered by other people arguing that the movement needed to stay open and that no decision could be taken by only a part of the group. Even though conflicts were often, after putting much effort in common actions, none of the members wanted to resign and form another group, and thus, OKUPÉ was brought to latency, and communication was limited to a minimum, so as to avoid conflicts.

Conclusions: What have we learned from this analysis?

The OKUPÉ movement had an active beginning and managed to gather a considerable number of people demanding changes at the university, including relations of power, surveillance policy, equality issues, lack of participation in decision-making processes and spatial planing at the new campus. It became a part of the International Student Movement's network of organizations struggling against commercialisation of education. However, the promising beginning has not led to a continuous mobilisation and the movement had to face internal conflicts, "burning out" of the members, fragmentation of interest and problems with decision-making and communication.

In this paper we tried to provide some hypotheses for reasons why the enthusiasm within OKUPÉ declined and the group seized to be active. These reasons were:

- internal conflicts, resulting from some differences in the group (such as different attitudes: to authorities, to radicalism, or to gender issues) and an academic culture valuing dispute, not unity;

- lack of clear rules about unacceptable behaviours and remarks (Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011);

- lack of experience with consensus decision-making and with efficient facilitation;

- few face-to-face meetings, as opposed to many online discussions;

- negotiating (with authorities) particular demands separately and vesting too much hope in these negotiations – thus, suspending mobilisation of new members.

It is difficult for us to say which factor was the most crucial one, using only observations and analysis of computer-mediated discussions, but we feel that they all played a role in bringing OKUPÉ to the latency state.

At the same time, while analysing these obstacles one could ask why the movement was active for a couple of months even though there were so many hindrances. Here, we propose following explanations:

- the very idea of consensus decision-making was particularly important for students and PhD students, who have a long experience of not being listened to (as in Mansbridge 2003, Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011);

- some degree of uniformity of the group, e.g. being unanimously against commercialisation of higher education, against corporations and state police at the campus, against the fence and surveillance;

- relative deprivation of PhD students who, as a result of poor funding of their research and the lack of scholarships, had some spare time, which they would probably have devoted to their research if they had been properly funded and had not needed to fight for decent working conditions;

- lack of scholarships was contrasted with extensive investments in the university's new buildings, which both caused feelings of injustice and gave an opportunity to try to have a voice about the new changes;

- accumulation of grievances which have not been addressed before, as no other movement had existed at the university for a longer time;

- attention and support from other groups of activists and movements outside academia.

Finally, we would like to suggest what lessons we have learned from this analysis, that is, what we would change in the future[7]:

- writing down clear rules for cooperation and a clear set of most important values in a smaller group, before calling for a big meeting and recruiting other members;

- moderation of posts;

- organising more face-to-face meetings;

- treating negotiations with authorities as a step in the process, but not its final point;

- discussing particular issues consequently in small working groups and sharing the results with the rest of participants later. This way, many exhausting discussions about the basic ideas could have been avoided with people who admit they like discussing just for the sake of it. On the other hand, this could lead to discussing all the crucial points twice - at the meeting and later, when the results are being presented, but some collective identity (of those who cooperated in the group for the final result) could make people less vulnerable in these discussions.

- knowledge how to organise a movement, as well as histories of activism - both failures and successes - need to be transmitted to the next cohorts of students coming to academia (compare: Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011).

As we have suggested, consensus decision making is not a well-known method in the Polish context, even in social movements. The method did not work as smoothly, as the founders had anticipated. This raises a question if the method should not be adjusted to the local context or changed to something else. Still, as activists and researchers we have decided not to resign from it too easily. We have even started teaching courses using this method. There are several reasons for this. First of all, we believe that movements with agenda set on democratisation should exercise the most democratic methods, and it is difficult for us to find a more democratic one. Second of all, the sole usage of the method was an important experience for us, as it changed our thinking about the university, democracy and the role of an individual in an institution. Consensus decision making was a challenge, but if we had not had it, we would probably not have started the movement at all.

OKUPÉ was an effort to unite on three levels: in the academic community, even though we knew of existing differences; with the international student movement; and with the local community, basing our struggle on the issue of fence that divided space into academia and the rest of the city. However, fence as a symbol and an empty signifier, just like other empty signifiers in Polish contentious politics, such as, one could argue, Solidarity or Stop-ACTA, can form movements characterised by size rather than durability. Due to broad

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[7]The topic of learning in OKUPÉ is analysed in Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011.

mobilisation and extended frames, bridging between particular demands, as well as unity in decision-making is a laborious task.

Enriching frame alignment theory with Fritz Heider's balance theory, a move suggested by Opp (2009), does not seem to work when applied to academics. The theory assumes that an individual can have either positive (likes) or negative (dislikes) affective relationship with objects (e.g. social movement organisations) or ideas (in case of social movements – demands). Balance is achieved when positive relationship to objects is combined with meeting it regularly, while avoiding disliked objects. However, in the specific context of academia the theory seems to lose its explanatory power, because – as we tried to illustrate above – academics may try to "cultivate differences", which means that they "like to criticise" some objects and, subsequently, they do not avoid them, that is, they stay in the movement, even if they do not agree with most of its demands.

In this article we tried to analyse OKUPÉ - its rise and fall, as well as its main characteristics, but possibly shedding some light also to struggles of other movements in Poland. It is our hope that the material presented here will be useful for a better understanding of contemporary social movements in Poland and East-Central Europe, and that it would also have some value to other activists who struggle to unite internally and with other movements.

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About the authors

Magdalena Prusinowska is a PhD student at the University of Gdansk (Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Education). She has background in Educational and Scandinavian Studies. She is a member and co-founder of the PhD Student Scientific Society 'Na Styku' and a member of PhD student council. She co-edited two books. Recently, she has joined an activist research initiative 'New Opening of the University' (NOU). Her main interests include university movements, social movement learning, intercultural education and refugee studies. She can be contacted at: magda.prusinowska AT gmail.com

Piotr Kowzan is a PhD student and a junior lecturer at the University of Gdańsk, Poland, Institute of Education. He co-edited two books, the last one about poverty in contemporary Poland. Co-founder and member of the PhD student Scientific Society 'Na Styku'. Recently, he has joined an activist research initiative 'New Opening of the University' (NOU). His main academic interests include social movement learning, adult education, comparative social work and economic anthropology. He plans to get his PhD for the work on the role of debt in adult learning. E-mail: dokpko AT ug.gda.pl

Małgorzata Zielińska is a PhD student at the Institute of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Gdańsk, Poland. She has background in Scandinavian Studies and Educational Studies. Her research interests include migration, pedagogy of place, intercultural education and adult education. She is a member of the PhD student Scientific Society 'Na Styku', as well as the research initiative 'New Opening of the University' (NOU). Recently, she has co-edited a book on poverty in Poland ('Oblicza biedy we współczesnej Polsce'). She can be contacted at malzi745 AT gmail.com