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Changes in the study programmes for historical studies in Poland in the years 2002-2020 based on the programmes introduced in the Institute of History of the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities

Abstract: After 1989, the availability of higher studies in Poland increased. Historical studies also became more popular. After a few years, however, the problem of teaching quality decrease was noticed. Therefore, standards for every field of study, including history, were developed. It was not the end of changes. From 2007, two-cycle studies were introduced. Each modification resulted in the decrease of the number of hours assigned to subjects related to historical epochs and methodological ones. Consequently, historical studies became practical studies preparing graduates for work in certain professions.

Key words: study programme, historical studies, Institute of History, UPH

Streszczenie: Po roku 1989 zwiększała się w Polsce dostępność do studiów wyższych. Na popularności zyskały również studia historyczne. Po kilku latach dostrzeżono problem obniżania się jakości kształcenia. Dlatego w 2002 roku zostały wprowadzone standardy dla poszczególnych kierunków studiów w tym również historii. Nie był to koniec zmian. Od 2007 r. zaczęto wdrażać program studiów dwustopniowych. Praktycznie przy każdej modyfikacji zmniejszano wymiar godzin przeznaczonych dla przedmiotów z epok historycznych oraz metodologicznych. W efekcie studia historyczne zyskiwały wymiar praktyczny przygotowujący do konkretnego zawodu.

Słowa kluczowe: program studiów, studia historyczne, Instytut Historii UPH

System changes that began in 1989 allowed for the development of new conditions for the functioning of the higher education system. Earlier years were characterized by a considerably small number of higher education institutions, transparent structure and uniform curricula contents. The Act on higher education

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of 1990¹ made higher schools relatively autonomous, allowing them, e.g. to prepare their own curricula contents. Simultaneously, private higher schools were allowed to be established, and state authorities' new educational policy aimed at increasing the number of students². It resulted in dynamic increase of the number of higher schools in Poland. In 1990, there were only 91 different higher schools, compared with 310³ and 460⁴ in 2000 and 2010, respectively. The same growing tendency applied to students.

However, threats related to making higher education mass education soon started to be noticed. The main problem was lower quality of teaching and differences across numerous higher schools (lack of uniformity). Therefore, teaching standards for each field of study were introduced by the Ordinance of the Minister of National Education and Sport of 18th April 2002⁵ to prevent this. This date is the starting point of my discussion.

The adopted regulations underwent changes, as a result of entering into force new Law on higher education⁶, which aimed at the introduction of the Bologna Declaration recommendations into the Polish system of education. This required transformation of long-cycle programmes into first- and second-cycle programmes, lasting 3 and 2 years, respectively, and ending in obtaining master's diploma. New teaching standards were developed and enacted in 2007⁷.

Both ordinances that introduced teaching standards in higher education defined contents/ subjects and the number of hours required for a given field of study (table 1). In the subsequent ordinance of 2011⁸ such a solution was dismissed. The requirement for study programs was to precisely detail the assumed learning outcomes and the description of the process of education, which was to guarantee their fulfilment. Therefore, the order did not contain a list of subjects that were to be

¹ Dziennik Ustaw RP (further as) Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 1990, No 65, item 385, Act of 12 September 1990 on higher education.

² DZIEDZICZAK-FOLTYN 2008: 53.

³ INGLOT-BRZEK 2012: 217.

⁴ Szkoły Wyższe i ich finanse, Warszawa 2011, p. 26.

⁵ Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2002, No 116, item 1004, the Ordinance of the Minister of National Education of 18 April 2002 on defining teaching standards for individual fields of studies and levels of study.

⁶ Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2005, No 164, item 1365, Act of 27 July 2005. Law on higher education.

⁷ Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2007, No 164, item 1366, Ordinance of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 12 July 2007 on teaching standards for individual fields of studies and levels of study as well as the mode of establishment and conditions for establishing interdisciplinary and macro-fields of studies in higher education institutions.

⁸ Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2011, No 243, item 1445, Ordinance of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 5 October 2011 on requirements for studies for a given field and level of study.

incorporated in the study programme. Further regulations regulated issues related to study programs in a similar way.

So, how did the historic studies program change over the years? For that purpose, study programs for the history field of study at the Institute of History of the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities were analysed.

Table 1 presents subjects, for which the required number of hours was specified in the above mentioned standards. Obviously, the table only shows major subjects, which, in my opinion, are the most important in the process of education of history students. For the purpose of the analysis of data for 2007, the first- and second-cycle programs should be treated as a whole, as it is possible to obtain master's degree only after completion of both levels of study, which is the equivalent of completion of the long-cycle (5-year) program and obtaining the same diploma.

The general minimum number of hours set out in the standards from 2007 is slightly larger than that set out in the standards from 2002, although the difference is not very large. However, the number of hours assigned to major subjects related to historic epochs is considerably smaller. This opinion may be premature, as in 2007, the number of hours for each epoch was not specified. Interestingly, subjects related to historic epochs are not compulsory in the second-cycle program, which is surprising, as graduates of other first-cycle programs may choose second-cycle program in history. Terminology used in each of the ordinances is also an obstacle in the research, as the groups of subjects do not correspond to each other. In order to analyse the differences, study programs developed at the Institute of History of the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities for academic years 2002/2003, 2004/2005, 2007/2008⁹, and 2019/2020 were used. It requires emphasizing that all study programs fulfilled the requirements set out in the regulations.

Due to limited space, the analysis only covers the total number of hours and the number of major hours assigned to subjects related to historic epochs as well as methodology – related and workshop subjects (table 2).

According to the data presented in table 2 the total number of hours in the curricula for history at the Institute of History of the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities increased after adoption of the above mentioned legally-binding standards, which should be considered a positive trend since larger number of hours assigned for a subject allows the teacher to pass more knowledge to students. However, it is worth noting that the total number of hours, amounting to 2790¹⁰, was the greatest in the study program adopted in 1997, compared with all subsequent programs, with one exception, namely the program for historic study,

⁹ All the discussed programmes are available at the Secretariat of the Institute of History of the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities. Programmes for the academic year 2019/2020 were enacted by the Senate of the UPH based on the Resolution no 145/2019 of 25 September 2019 on specifying the study programme for the history field of study.

¹⁰ MADEJ 2019: 74.

speciality “teaching history and promotion of history of Poland”, introduced in the academic year 2019/2020. This issue, however, is outside the scope of this research.

Increase of the total number of hours in the programs poses a question – for which subjects did the number of hours increase? From the point of view of historic knowledge, which I adopted, the most desirable would have been increasing the number of hours assigned to subjects related to historical epochs¹¹ as well as methodology-related and workshop subjects preparing students for research¹². In reality, as the programs show, the number of hours decreased drastically. The program for 2002/2003 proposed as many as 900 hours covering the following subjects: ancient history, medieval history, modern history – XIX and XX century as well as prehistory. Compared with the newly adopted standards for 2002/2003, which specified the minimum number of hours equal to 510, the number of hours taught was greater: the number of hours taught compared with the number of hours set out by the standards was as follows: medieval history – 180/90, modern history, and history – XIX century – 150/90 each, history – XX century 240/120.

Three years later the number of hours taught decreased. In the 2005/2006 programme, the number of hours assigned for “epoch-related” subjects was reduced to 585. The number of hours assigned to each of the subjects: medieval history, modern history, and history – XIX century was 90 hours (which was the required minimum set out by the standards). The only subjects for which the number of hours taught were greater than the specified minimum were history – XX century, for which the number of hours taught amounted to 165 hours (required minimum was 120 hours) and archaeology of Polish territories – 60 hours taught (the required minimum was 30 hours).

A huge change was the introduction of a two-level system of studies, adapted to fit the new standards. The corresponding program for 2008/2009 comprised only 495 hours assigned to “epoch-related” subjects, although major-related curriculum content as described in the standards required even fewer hours, i.e. 420. The number of hours assigned to the subjects was as follows: each of 5 epochs was assigned 90 hours, and archaeology of Polish territories was assigned 45 hours, which is the number of hours taught at present.

¹¹ Subjects dedicated to individual epochs are: archaeology or prehistory, ancient history, general and Polish medieval history, general and Polish modern history, general and Polish history - XIX century, general and Polish history – XX century. Particular subjects sometimes had different names, but their names usually included related time interval. It is much more difficult to assign subjects to particular epochs, when we consider the second-cycle program, which was adopted for the academic year 2007/2008. In this case, taking particular subjects into account is my subjective decision.

¹² Workshop-related and methodological subjects are: introduction to historical research and historian’s scientific workshop (first-cycle programme) as well as auxiliary sciences of history, methodology of history and history of historiography.

Subjects taught during the second-cycle programme ought to supplement the subjects taught during the first-cycle programme, which in reality is extremely difficult to accomplish, due to the problem of repeating the same content, taught during the first cycle-programme. On the one hand, second-cycle programme in history is selected by students who completed first-cycle programmes in other fields, and have only general historical knowledge. An attempt to avoid repetition of content and making all students familiar with the required content, was to include in the second-cycle programmes subjects, whose names indicated quite narrow specialization. However, considering the above reservations, these subjects ought to be treated as epoch-related ones. They are presented in table 3.

The second-cycle study program used by the Institute of History since 2008/2009 comprised only 75 hours assigned to subjects assigned to historical epochs. It made a total of 570 hours, when added to the number of hours dedicated to such subjects during the first-cycle studies, which was a smaller number than in the previous programme. Further modifications of second-cycle study programmes brought the increase of the number of hours dedicated to “epoch-related” subjects. In the academic year 2012/2013, the number of hours increased to 120, and in the current academic year – to 150, which gives the totals of 615 and 645 hours of history in the programmes comprising 2685 and 2715 hours, respectively. The respective percentages are equal to 22.9 and 23.7% of all hours included in the programmes.

It seems that in the case of major subjects, related to historic periods, the increase of the total number of hours resulting from the introduction of uniform teaching standards in Poland did not have much impact. To the contrary, at the beginning the number of hours assigned for studying history of individual epochs was considerably reduced. The small increase of the number of hours in the last decade is the result of the conviction of the employees and the director of the Institute of History that the number of hours assigned for “epoch-related” subjects, especially during the second-cycle program is too small rather than being the result of systemic changes.

The situation related to methodology and workshop subjects is analogical. In the academic year 2002/2003, they comprised 225 hours in total. Three years later they were the number of hours was reduced to 180, which continued until the last few years. The number of hours was increased a little by the 2019/2020 programme, in which 210 hours were assigned for this group of subjects – an increase by 15 hours in the first and the second-cycle programmes. Here also appears the problem of repeating certain content, which students who completed the first-cycle programmes other than history need to be get familiar with. It applies to such subjects as the introduction to historical research (first-cycle programme) and historian’s scientific workshop (second-cycle programme). Obviously, it results in the reduction of new content in the curricula.

The final conclusion is unambiguous. The standardization of study programmes for the history field of study, either in the form of specification of the minimum number of hours assigned for individual subjects and groups of subjects, or in the form of assigning each subject ECTS points¹³, resulted in considerable decrease of the number of hours dedicated to individual historic epochs and subjects preparing for conducting historical research. Additionally, a two-level system of studies often requires repeating certain content, which results in lower efficiency, which is not balanced by the increase of the total number of hours in the first- and second- cycle study programmes treated as a whole. The question that comes to mind is which subjects these additional hours were assigned to. It seems that the greatest number of these additional hours was assigned to vocational subject, related to the practical speciality¹⁴. This is in line with the national trend of revolutionized conception of higher education aiming at its practical application – usefulness on the job market, which is the consequence of greater availability of higher studies after 1990. Detailed analysis of this phenomenon, however, exceeds the thematic scope of this paper.

¹³ ECTS =European Credit Transfer System. ECTS points are relative measure of the output of student's work required to obtain a credit for a given subject. ECTS point is an equivalent to 25–30 hours of student's work comprising classes organized by the university and student's individual work related to the classes in question. Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2018, item 1168, Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on higher education and science. In force in Poland since 1st January, 2007.

¹⁴ The analysis of the 2019/2020 programme shows a very characteristic situation, where the number of hours related to the speciality “teaching history and promotion of the history of Poland” is provided in brackets. It is higher than the number of hours offered within other specialities by 90 and 210 hours at the first- and second-cycle programmes, respectively. The difference resulting from the adoption of a new teaching standard preparing for the performance of the profession of teacher in July 2019. Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2019, item 1450.

Table 1. The number of hours for each subject for the history field of study specified by the teaching standards from 2002 and 2007.

Teaching standards 2002		Teaching standards 2007			
Long-cycle (Master's degree) programmes	Number of hours	First-cycle program	Number of hours	Second-cycle program	Number of hours
Number of hours	Approx. 2500	Minimum number of hours	1600	Minimum number of hours	800
Core subjects	360	Other required	270	Other required	no
Core subjects and major subjects including:	930	Major-related content, including:	420	Major-related content	165
Ancient history	90	Ancient history	no	Historian's scientific workshop	no
Archaeology of the Polish territories	30	Prehistory of the Polish territories	no	Methodology of history and history of historiography	no
Medieval history	90	Medieval history	no		
Modern history (including XVIII century)	90	Modern history	no		
History - XIX century (to 1918)	90	History XIX century	no		
History XX century	120	History XX century	no		
Introduction to historical research	30	Core-related content	150	Core-related content	105
Auxiliary sciences of history	90	Latin	60	Statistics and demography for historians	45
Methodology of history and history of historiography	60	Vade mecum of historic studies	30	Translation from Latin or a modern language	60
Proseminar	60	Auxiliary sciences of history	60		
Master's thesis seminar	120				
Monographic lecture	60				

Own compilation based on: Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2002, No 116, item 1004, Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2007, No 164, item 1366.

Table. 2. The total number of hours and the number of hours devoted to subjects related to historic epochs as well as methodology- related and workshop subjects in the curricula of the Institute of History of the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in the years 2002/2003 – 2019/2020.

Year of the introduction of the study program	Total number of hours		Number of hours assigned to each historic epoch		Number of hours assigned to methodology-related subjects	
2002/2003	2460		900		225	
2005/2006	2505		585		180	
2008/2009	First-cycle	1830	2655	495	90	180
	Second-cycle	825		75	90	
2012/2013	First-cycle	1845	2685	495	90	180
	Second-cycle	840		120	90	
2019/2020	First-cycle	1875 (1965)*	2715 (3015)*	495	105	210
	Second-cycle	840 (1050)*		150	645	

*The number in brackets denotes the total number of hours for the speciality: teaching history and promotion of history of Poland.

Own compilation based on the documents archived in the Secretariat of the Institute of History of the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities – resolution No 145/2019 of 25 September 2019.

Table 3. Subjects dedicated to individual historic epochs in the second-cycle programme for the history field of study at the Institute of History of the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in the years 2008/2009 - 2019/2020

epoch	2008/2009 programme	2012/2013 programme	2019/2020 programme
	subjects (number of hours)		
Archaeology/ Prehistory	no	no	no
Antiquity	no	no	Socio-political history of antiquity/ Culture of antique civilizations (30 hours)
Middle Ages	Poland in Medieval Europe (15 hours)	History of Polish military to the end of the 18 th century at the background of Europe/ History of the Church in Poland to the end of the 18 th century at the general background (30 hours)*	Socio-political history of the Middle Ages /Culture of the Middle Ages (30 hours)*
Modern History	Poland against the rivalry of European states in modern times (15 hours)	Multiculturalism in the Republic of Poland before partitions (30 hours)	General and Polish socio-economic history in the 16 th -18 th centuries / History of Polish culture in 16 th -18 th (30 hours)*
XIX century	Socio-economic changes in the partitioned Poland (15 hours)	History of Polish military in the 19 th -21 st centuries against the background of Europe. History of the Church in Poland in the 19 th -21 st at the general background (30 hours)*	General and Polish socio-economic history in the 19 th -21 st centuries / History of Polish culture in 19 th -21 st (30 hours)*
XX century	Foreign politics of Poland in the 20 th century (15 hours) Jewish community in the 20 th century (15 hours)	Central and Eastern Europe from the Versailles treaty to modern times/ Foreign politics of Poland w XX-XXI w. (30 hours)*	Central and Eastern Europe from the Versailles treaty to modern times/ Foreign politics of Poland w XX-XXI w. (30 hours)*

*Elective subject.

Own compilation based on the documents of the Secretariat of the Institute of History of the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities and the Resolution of the Senate of the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities no 145/2019 of 25 September 2019.

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