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# **Student Culture and Academic Sport as Integral Elements of the Functioning of a University**

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## **Chapter 1. Characteristics of Student Culture and Academic Sport**

The contemporary university fulfills a significantly broader role and is not merely a place for acquiring theoretical and practical knowledge derived from the curriculum. It is a space that fosters the development of students' passions, talents, and individual aptitudes. Student-artists and student-athletes constitute a distinct group within the academic community, combining their studies with demanding creative or sporting endeavors. The authors of this publication aim to explore the subject of student culture and academic sport, covering their history and origins in higher education, the support available to students, as well as the associated infrastructure and implemented projects.

### **Characterization of Student Culture with a Historical Perspective**

Student culture constitutes an integral body of artistic and cultural animation activities, as well as events specific to the academic community. It comprises a wide array of formal and informal practices that have developed alongside the expansion of higher education, defining the unique character of university life. Historically, this phenomenon played a crucial role, particularly during the era of the Polish People's Republic, when student culture was closely monitored yet simultaneously treated by the authorities of the time in a unique manner. It served as a distinct "island of freedom" and a mechanism allowing for the defusing of social tensions. Censorship in student clubs was significantly more lenient than in official channels, allowing for a bolder exploration of taboo subjects and experimentation with form and content. During that period, activity within structures such as the Polish Students' Association (Zrzeszenie Studentów Polskich), despite being state-funded, retained a rebellious and avant-garde nature. It also served as a training ground for talent, as the path to a career as a director, actor, or journalist led almost inevitably through involvement in student theaters or discussion clubs.

The contemporary image of student culture differs fundamentally from the historical model described in the relevant literature. Whereas it once served as an alternative to the drab reality and a form of political manifesto, today it has become an intrinsic part of pop culture, the labor market, and the education system. The key change that has occurred over the years is a shift in emphasis from a sense of mission to the professionalization of activities. In the past, students created theater or wrote articles to express their rebellion and the truth about the world. Currently, this motivation has given way to pragmatism, where extracurricular activity is treated as an opportunity to acquire soft skills, learn project management, and enrich one's CV before entering the job market.

This transformation is best visible in the example of Juwenalia and the functioning of student clubs. The students' festival, which once bore the character of spontaneous parades and grassroots initiatives organized in opposition to the solemnity of the city, has undergone profound commercialization. Today's Juwenalia are largely professional, ticketed music festivals, produced with the support of major corporations and sponsors.

In this process, student governments assume the role of event agencies that, instead of promoting niche student creativity, book popular stars of the music scene. A similar fate has befallen legendary student clubs. The boundary between a venue dedicated to the academic community and a profit-oriented commercial club has blurred. When choosing a venue for a Friday night, the contemporary student is rarely guided by a student ethos, but more often by the musical offerings available to the city's general population.

Academic media and the scientific movement have also undergone an evolution. University radio stations and television channels have ceased to function as a "mouthpiece of the opposition" fighting against censorship. Instead, they have become professionally equipped newsrooms serving as a professional training ground for teaching the journalistic craft. In turn, the focus of innovation and creativity has shifted toward student research clubs, which have taken over the role of the student elite. It is within these structures that students build racing cars, construct Mars rovers, or organize specialized conferences. However, this activity is geared towards market and technological success, rather than the contestation of the socio-political system.

Sociologists indicate that student culture, in its traditional, formative sense, has faded, a result of two primary factors. The first is the massification of higher education, which has meant that being a student is no longer the hallmark of an elite social group. The second factor is the absence of a common enemy, which in the past united the community. Today, the student consumes the same global cultural goods as the rest of society, feeling no need to create their own hermetic circuit. Consequently, contemporary student culture has evolved towards hobbyist and professional activity, which is less romantic but significantly more focused on concrete educational goals and career paths. This does not diminish its value in any way; thanks to current freedom and opportunities, one can focus more on their own internal development within student culture.

### **Academic Sport from a Historical Perspective**

The origins of the formalized functioning of academic sport at Polish universities date back to May 15, 1909, with the establishment of the Academic Sports Association (Akademicki Związek Sportowy – AZS) in Kraków. In subsequent years, AZS branches were developed in Warsaw, Poznań, Vilnius, Lviv, Gdańsk, and Lublin. In 1919, representatives of the AZS participated in the founding of the Polish Olympic Committee, thereby contributing to the functioning of sport throughout the country for years to come. Currently, the AZS comprises 168 clubs, with exactly 77,091 registered members. It should be noted, however, that academic sport is not limited to the AZS, but also encompasses numerous sports and recreational initiatives organized by universities. Student governments and organizations, sports sections, and certain research clubs regularly organize recreational or sporting events aimed at the academic community, which are capable of engaging a large number of participants.

A significant development in the functioning of academic sport can be observed over the years. Beginning with city-wide AZS branches in the early 20th century, universities currently possess their own distinct clubs, affiliated with regional organizations. This has increased the autonomy of individual universities regarding cooperation with university clubs, allowing them to jointly develop beneficial solutions while taking into account, for example, the specific nature of education within individual units. There has also been a significant development of sports infrastructure, not only under the AZS banner but also university-owned facilities used to support academic sport. Starting with tennis courts in Kraków in 1910, and concluding today with large multi-purpose arenas, indoor swimming pools, and fitness centers that remain at the disposal of AZS branches and universities. The Academic Championships of Poland represent another aspect that has undergone a dramatic transformation over the course of the last century. The initial instigator of sports competition between AZS clubs was Józef Piłsudski (whose name the University of Physical Education in Warsaw bears today); under his patronage, the Academic Olympiad was held in 1921, featuring AZS representatives from Poznań, Warsaw, and Vilnius. Subsequently, two years later in Kraków, the first AZS Polish Championships were held, featuring representative teams from six Polish cities. Currently, the Academic Championships of Poland (AMP) are contested in 31 sports disciplines, and in the men's futsal competitions alone between 2022 and 2025, 110 university AZS clubs participated.

However, the influence of student-athletes and those affiliated with AZS clubs on national sport remains unchanged. Since the very beginning, AZS representatives have represented our country at the Olympic Games, as well as World, European, and Polish Championships across various disciplines, repeatedly achieving significant success. Notable figures certainly include Leon Jucewicz, Halina Konopacka, and Waldemar Baszanowski, who laid the foundations for the later international successes of AZS representatives such as Otylia Jędrzejczak, Tomasz Majewski, Justyna Kowalczyk, Natalia Bukowiecka (Kaczmarek), and Anita Włodarczyk.

## **Chapter II – Support for Student-Artists and Student-Athletes**

### **Joint Initiatives**

Student-artists and student-athletes can be supported by the University in a multitude of ways. Due to the significant autonomy regarding the day-to-day operations of higher education institutions, including the drafting of internal regulations, the support provided to students can be comprehensive, individualized, and tailored to the needs arising from the educational differences between specific types of universities. Support is also provided by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

The Rector's Scholarship – in accordance with the Act of 20 July 2018 – The Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws of 2018, item 1668, as amended), the Rector's Scholarship may be awarded to a student who has obtained outstanding learning results, scientific or artistic achievements, or sports achievements in competition at least at the national level.

In turn, universities, exercising their autonomy, independently determine the content of the regulations on benefits and the resulting detailed criteria for receiving benefits, including the Rector's Scholarship. Students participate in the process of establishing the aforementioned regulations, as the content is developed within the framework of an agreement between the Rector and the student self-government, thereby ensuring students have appropriate influence over its content.

The Scholarship of the Minister of Science and Higher Education for Significant Achievements for Students – annually, talented students may apply for the award of an additional scholarship funded by the higher education department. This scholarship is intended for students distinguished by significant artistic or sporting achievements. However, artistic achievements must be related to the field of study being pursued in order for the student to receive such a scholarship. In the previous academic year, the scholarship was awarded to 398 students, including 35 student-athletes, and the scholarship amount was 17,000 PLN.

Individual Organization of Studies – in accordance with regulations, a student has the right to pursue studies according to an individual organization of studies. The manner of this organization is defined in the university's study regulations, which, once again, require agreement with the student self-government. A good practice adopted by universities is the introduction of provisions into the regulations that specifically account for student-artists and student-athletes regarding the pursuit of their studies on an individual basis. Particularly in the case of athletes, due to frequent training camps or practice sessions, the possibility of individualizing and increasing the flexibility of their studies allows them to reconcile all their responsibilities.

### **Student Artists**

Students of art universities in Poland, such as the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk or the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music, operate within a specific financial aid system. This stems from the fact that, unlike the majority of students who fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, these institutions are supervised by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. This departmental affiliation opens the path to dedicated scholarships that primarily reward unique creative achievements, rather than solely theoretical academic performance. The foundation of the system, aimed at equalizing educational opportunities, is need-based financial support. This is a baseline available at every public university, regulated by statute, where the key indicator is the income per family member. The level of the income threshold is determined annually by the Rector in agreement with the student self-government. Importantly, students in a difficult financial situation may apply for an increase in the social scholarship amount on the grounds of residing in a student dormitory or other facility, if a daily commute to the university would be impossible or significantly hindered.



Regardless of income, a scholarship for persons with disabilities is awarded. This benefit is available to every student who submits a valid disability certificate or a certificate of inability to work. This system is complemented by the emergency aid payment, a one-off financial support grant awarded in the event of a sudden, unforeseen deterioration of one's living situation. In the context of art universities, the definition of such an event is broader than at general universities. At institutions such as the UMFC or ASP, emergency aid may be granted, for example, in the case of the theft of an expensive instrument or specialized equipment necessary for creative work, provided that this loss drastically worsens the student's livelihood and renders further education impossible.

The most significant differences between art universities and general universities are evident in the system of Rector's scholarships awarded for academic performance and achievements. Although the grade point average (GPA) is taken into consideration, artistic achievements are often weighted significantly higher and are the deciding factor in awarding the grant to the top students of the year. These criteria are closely tailored to the specific profile of the university. In the case of the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, points are primarily awarded for individual and group exhibitions, awards in national and international competitions, as well as the publication of works in catalogues. Conversely, at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music, the key factors include participation in prestigious concerts, winning accolades in music competitions—both as soloists and in chamber ensembles—as well as professional album recordings.

The most prestigious form of reward is the Scholarship of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage. It is granted by the Minister upon the Rector's recommendation to students who demonstrate outstanding achievements and is financed directly from the state budget, not from the university's funds. To receive it, a student must present a significant portfolio, such as awards in highly renowned international competitions or extensive artistic activity, which may include a series of exhibitions in prestigious galleries or performances in philharmonic halls.

However, support at art universities extends beyond direct financial aid and also encompasses access to infrastructure and promotional activities. Institutions such as the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk offer access to specialized ceramics, sculpture, or lithography studios, and subsidize open-air painting and sculpture workshops. The Fryderyk Chopin University of Music, in turn, enables the borrowing of high-class instruments from the university's collection and provides access to practice rooms that remain open until late hours. Assistance in promotion is also significant, realized through the organization of end-of-year exhibitions in city galleries—such as the Armoury of Arts (Zbrojownia Sztuki)—as well as diploma concerts and cooperation with career services offices.

The specific nature of art studies even influences the character of student dormitories. Dormitories at fine arts universities are often equipped with studios facilitating so-called "dirty work," such as painting.

In turn, the "Dziekanka" music dormitory in Warsaw is a unique venue, offering soundproofed music practice rooms, which is crucial for students requiring many hours of daily instrumental practice without disturbing the peace of other residents.

In addition to university support, student-artists may benefit from external grants and programs. An example is the "Young Poland" (Młoda Polska) program of the National Centre for Culture, which offers substantial funding for project implementation or the purchase of instruments. Equally important are local government scholarships awarded by cities such as Gdańsk or Warsaw to talented artists studying within their respective areas. The system is complemented by the Erasmus+ program, which, at art universities, places immense emphasis on international exchange, enabling students to study at prestigious European conservatories with scholarship support paid in euros. The official support system supervised by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (MKiDN) provides student-artists not only with funds for basic subsistence but, above all, invests in their professional development. The entire assistance structure, ranging from emergency aid for lost instruments to scholarships for exhibitions, is designed to reward creative activity that extends beyond the walls of the university.

### **Student-Athletes**

Due to the specific nature and challenges associated with professional training, student-athletes require support that differs slightly in certain aspects from that of student-artists. We will attempt to outline the measures that effectively support student-athletes.

A particular program supporting student-athletes is the National Academic Representation (Narodowa Reprezentacja Akademicka). This year, for the sixth time, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education has invited universities to nominate their athletes for the program. Top-level athletes can be covered by program support, which allows for the completion of 100 hours of individual or group classes within the framework of an Individual Organization of Studies. The project also provides for distance learning methods that facilitate the achievement of the learning outcomes established for a given field of study. The university that received the highest funding in this year's edition (2025) is the Jerzy Kukuczka Academy of Physical Education in Katowice, with an awarded amount of 4,460,000 PLN.

Just like any social group engaged in various types of communal activities, athletes encounter similar challenges and obstacles on their sporting paths. An important element in resolving them is the creation of a space for the mutual exchange of experiences, not only among the athletes themselves but also taking into account the perspective of the other side, such as coaches, officials, and other individuals involved in academic sport. Such a venue can be found in the Academic Sports Congress, organized annually by the Academic Sports Association (AZS). It serves as an opportunity to exchange views, understand

the other side, and develop joint solutions. It is a meeting place not only for athletes, coaches, or AZS officials, but also for university representatives; furthermore, the diversification of specific stakeholder groups during discussion panels allows for a deep exploration of the topic from various perspectives. The support of academic sport through the sharing of best practices and the development of beneficial solutions is also undertaken by the Commission of Physical Education Universities (Komisja Uczelni Wychowania Fizycznego), operating under the Students' Parliament of the Republic of Poland. This body is an association of the student self-governments of all Universities of Physical Education. Within the scope of its activities, the Commission collects and analyzes data, prepares reports, and formulates recommendations that contribute to the implementation of solutions supporting student-athletes at universities.

Access to sports facilities outside of scheduled classes is another element that can tangibly improve the development of academic sport and athletes at higher education institutions. The hours designated for students to use sports infrastructure are usually limited, as universities commercially rent out facilities to external clients. Students regularly express the need and desire to utilize the gyms, swimming pools, or sports halls of their universities. The "Self-Improvement Hours" projects, implemented by universities such as the Academy of Physical Education (AWF) in Katowice, the AWF Warsaw branch in Biała Podlaska, and the AWF in Kraków, can be cited as a best practice regarding making sports facilities available to students. Within the framework of these hours, university infrastructure is made available to students free of charge, allowing them to learn or perfect their motor skills and cultivate physical activity under suitable conditions. An integral component of supporting student-athletes is the allocation of funding for the development of academic sport. Even the legislator has provided for this possibility in the Law on Higher Education and Science, allowing universities to allocate funds for the implementation of activities by the AZS and its university clubs. However, this subject cannot be limited solely to the funding of athletes in the form of scholarships, as it also encompasses support for student governments and organizations in the execution of their activities related to academic sport. Adequate resources will enable the organization of events by ensuring the necessary technical, medical, and officiating support.

### **CHAPTER III – INFRASTRUCTURE**

Sports and cultural infrastructure constitutes one of the most important elements of the modern academic environment, directly influencing the quality of student life and the conditions for their comprehensive development. Higher education institutions in Poland, regardless of their profile or specific nature, currently play the role not only of educational institutions but also of hubs for social, creative, and recreational-sports activity. As higher education develops and student expectations rise, a diverse and modern infrastructural base is gaining increasing importance, encompassing both sports facilities and cultural spaces – concert halls, academic theaters, art galleries, and cultural centers.

## **Cultural Infrastructure**

In the case of art universities—and others—the appearance of the infrastructure varies depending on the individual specificity of the university. Below are good examples and types of infrastructure based on specific universities.

The Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław boasts the Centre for Applied Arts and Innovation, a modern edifice operating much like a factory. There, students have access to gigantic kilns for firing ceramics and glass—ranking among the largest of such devices in Europe—as well as advanced 3D printing laboratories and photographic studios equipped with cycloramas. This offering is complemented by metalworking and woodworking shops, providing design students with ideal conditions for creating prototypes ranging from furniture to even car bodies.

The Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź focuses on the fashion industry within its Fashion Promotion Centre. The heart of this facility is a professional auditorium featuring a twenty-four-meter runway—the longest in Poland. The hall is equipped with world-class lighting and multimedia systems, allowing students to showcase their collections in conditions that mirror the realities of professional fashion shows.

Film and theatre schools boast Hollywood-grade technology, which is best illustrated by the example of the Łódź Film School. Its New Media Centre houses digital archives and editing suites operating on Avid and DaVinci systems. The school also possesses a TV studio with a green screen and a motion capture system used for games and animation. A key asset is the school's own stock of film cameras from brands such as Arri Alexa or RED; while the commercial rental of such equipment is extremely expensive, here students are provided with access to them as part of the educational package. The Faculty of Radio and Television at the University of Silesia in Katowice, known as the Krzysztof Kieślowski Film School, presents itself just as impressively. Its headquarters is an architecturally award-winning building featuring characteristic openwork brickwork, housing within its interior a cinema hall with the Dolby Atmos sound standard, a film production studio, and professional photography studios.

In the case of music universities, the priority is acoustic perfection. The Academy of Music in Katowice, on its campus at Wojewódzka Street, possesses a spectacular building featuring a concert hall with variable acoustics. Thanks to adjustable ceiling and wall panels, it is possible to tailor the reverberation to the type of music being performed, ranging from organ music to jazz. This hall is connected to recording studios, enabling the recording of concerts in album quality.

Universities and universities of technology are also investing in this type of infrastructure, establishing media and cultural centers that serve the development of soft skills. Following a general renovation, the "Chatka Żaka" Academic Centre for Culture and Media at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS) in Lublin has become one of the best-equipped facilities in the country.

It houses a television studio with 4K cameras and teleprompters, as well as Radio Centrum, which features professional soundproofing and broadcast consoles, operating as a fully-fledged broadcasting station. Similar facilities are offered by the Jagiellonian University on the Ruczaj Campus, where the Faculty of Management and Social Communication provides journalism students with access to television and radio studios for learning live program production.

Contemporary student infrastructure also encompasses multi-functional cultural zones that are replacing traditional student clubs. At the Wrocław University of Science and Technology, the Student Culture Zone (Strefa Kultury Studenckiej) was established as a two-story building featuring a large auditorium and a canteen that transforms into a club in the evenings. This venue was designed with co-working and the organization of events by student research groups in mind.

In Toruń, the legendary "Od Nowa" club at the Nicolaus Copernicus University (UMK) underwent extensive modernization, evolving into a professional cultural institution. The facility currently features a theater and concert stage, an art gallery, and a cinema hall, serving as an example of a successful transformation from a student space into a modern center subsidized by both the university and the city.

At universities of technology, technical culture is cultivated in specialized workshops and makerspace-type environments. An example is the Centre for Innovation and Technology Transfer Management at the Warsaw University of Technology, where students have access to 3D printers, laser plotters, and advanced electronics. It is precisely in such venues, accessible to student research groups, that engineering creativity is born, enabling the construction of robots, artistic installations, or prototypes of inventions.

## **Sports Infrastructure**

**Sports and Multi-Purpose Halls** – these facilities provide the opportunity to train in various disciplines in a single location, making their construction attractive from the university's perspective.

In 2023, the AGH University of Science and Technology in Kraków opened a modern multi-purpose sports hall at 5A Armii Krajowej Street. The facility accommodates simultaneous use by one thousand people, and its amenities include gyms, squash courts, fitness rooms, a climbing wall, staff rooms, and a wellness zone with hydromassage and a sauna, as well as two sports halls, one of which has a seating capacity of 620. The building also features two green gardens and photovoltaics. Its comprehensive equipment and modern solutions have rendered this facility an ideal place for training and the individual development of every person exercising there. For two years now, it has been home to 47 sections of the AZS AGH university club.

Wrocław University of Science and Technology boasts a modern sports hall, opened to the academic community in mid-2020, which is located adjacent to a second facility constructed four years earlier. The facilities at Chełmońskiego Street meet the needs of students and staff, while also serving as an important sports and recreational hub for local residents.



The halls are equipped with gyms, a fitness and dance studio, a martial arts room, as well as dedicated volleyball and basketball courts. Beyond the sports area, the facility also houses conference rooms, enabling the university or external entities to utilize the venue in an even more comprehensive manner.

**Indoor Swimming Pools** – swimming pools are increasingly appearing in the infrastructure inventory of universities. They serve as venues for physical education classes, sports training, rehabilitation, or recreation.

The Olympic Pool, part of the Sports and Rehabilitation Centre at the Medical University of Warsaw, serves as a prime example of a comprehensive indoor swimming facility. The main pool features ten fifty-meter lanes, with the capability to divide the basin into two separate 25-meter pools. It was also designed with a movable floor to adjust water depth, and the pool is adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. Grandstands seating 670 spectators and adjustable lighting enable the hosting of international swimming competitions. The facility also houses a smaller training and warm-up pool, where recreational classes and swimming lessons for children take place, alongside dry and steam saunas. The versatility and technological advancement of the facility allow it to effectively meet the needs of both the academic and local communities.

The University of Life Sciences in Lublin, located at 31 Głęboka Street, possesses two swimming pools. A six-lane sports pool, as well as a smaller recreational pool featuring a paddling pool for swimming lessons, a hydromassage zone, a Jacuzzi, and water loungers, cater to the needs of students, staff, and local residents. Grandstands seating 194 spectators enable the organization of sports competitions under the homologation of the Polish Swimming Federation. As university infrastructure, the swimming pools create opportunities for establishing cooperation with sports clubs, the Polish Swimming Federation, or other academic entities; furthermore, by making the pools available to the local community, they bolster the university's positive image among residents.

**Playing Fields and Stadiums** – fields, stadiums, and multi-purpose sports facilities constitute the fundamental infrastructure for conducting physical education classes and sports training, due to their versatility regarding the disciplines that can be practiced on a shared surface.

The Eugeniusz Piasecki Academy of Physical Education in Poznań serves as an excellent example of a university possessing a multi-purpose outdoor stadium. In recent years, the surface underwent an extensive renovation with financial support from the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. Currently, the stadium accommodates an athletics track, an area for athletics throwing events, and—in the central part—a multi-purpose pitch with an artificial surface. The pitch is primarily intended for field hockey, due to the university's strong standing in this discipline and its cooperation with the Polish Field Hockey Association. The new surface has allowed for obtaining the certification necessary to host international-level competitions at the facility and conduct professional broadcasts, a capability further supported by a professional lighting system.

The pitch also serves didactic purposes, as football and handball classes take place there. The facility's wide functional range aids the university in establishing strategic partnerships with the socio-economic environment.

Another example of a multi-purpose sports facility within university infrastructure is the complex at the Białystok University of Technology, opened in mid-2024. The space is modern, designed in harmony with the environment, and accessible to people with disabilities. Students, staff, and pupils of the Academic General Secondary School have access to an "Orlik-type" football pitch, a multi-purpose court for volleyball, basketball, and handball, tennis and squash courts, beach volleyball courts, and a calisthenics park. Students and staff may also utilize the facilities outside of teaching hours to pursue their interests.

## **CHAPTER IV – KEY UNIVERSITY PROJECTS**

Universities implement numerous cultural and sports initiatives and projects that play a significant role within the academic community. They also strengthen the institution's positive image in the eyes of internal and external stakeholders and constitute an integral element of academic life. These projects are nominated and recognized in nationwide competitions, such as the "Pro Juvenes" Student Community Awards Gala, organized by the Students' Parliament of the Republic of Poland.

### **Cultural Projects**

The diversity of higher education institutions translates into a vast scope of cultural projects they implement. The most recognizable and widespread form of this activity is Juwenalia (student festivals), which take on various forms depending on the organizational model. These are often mass events organized in cooperation with municipal authorities or within the framework of broad agreements between student governments, a flagship example of which are the joint Kraków or Gdańsk Juwenalia. On the other hand, there are more intimate and strictly profiled events limited to a single institution, as is the case with the Artistic Juwenalia at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw.

Alongside the high-profile student Juwenalia, more focused and cyclical artistic initiatives play a vital role. An example of such an initiative is the "FOR REAL" exhibition, the second edition of which took place in the WL4 Mleczny Piotr space at the Imperial Shipyard in Gdańsk. This event serves as an interesting showcase of contemporary student culture, uniquely combining the industrial rawness of a historical site with academic artistic output. This initiative is organized as a grassroots effort by the student community of the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, with the aim of promoting emerging artists and highlighting themes that currently preoccupy the young generation.

Another example of a long-standing cultural project—this time in the realm of student theatre—is the Student Theatre Spring (Studencka Wiosna Teatralna), organized by the "Chatka Żaka" Academic Centre for Culture and Media at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS) in Lublin. It is one of the oldest and most significant festivals of its kind in Poland, serving as an open and professional platform for young creators seeking innovative forms of expression and a space for artistic experimentation.



The festival combines presentations of the best performances from across the country with professional workshops led by renowned stage practitioners. Consequently, this initiative not only promotes alternative culture but also performs a vital educational function, allowing students to develop their skills within the professional environment of this Lublin cultural center.

The National Review of Student Culture, organized by the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, is an event aimed at bringing together young artists from all over Poland and creating a space for them to showcase their talents across various artistic disciplines. The program is highly diverse and features theatrical, musical, and dance performances, film screenings, as well as visual arts presentations, complemented by workshops and meetings with experts. This review serves not merely as a competition but, above all, constitutes a vital platform fostering development, the effective exchange of experiences, and the integration of the entire academic community.

An example of initiatives within film culture is the Węgiel Film Festival, passionately organized by students of the Krzysztof Kieślowski Film School at the University of Silesia in Katowice. The festival's primary objective is to showcase the creative output of film school students from around the world, as well as to facilitate the integration of schools and the exchange of creative experiences. Participants have the opportunity to compare cinematic achievements, observe the craft of their peers, discuss artistic perspectives, and gain recognition from a professional jury. Thanks to the annual participation of numerous foreign productions, the festival enjoys growing popularity and holds international status.

### **Sports Projects**

The University of Łódź Sports Juwenalia was organized in 2025 to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the University's academic community. During the event, students, doctoral candidates, and staff could compete and participate—in a friendly and sporting atmosphere—in the following disciplines and competitions: volleyball, table tennis, an "80 km for the 80th Anniversary" swimming relay, rowing, yoga, basketball, judo, dancing, and bench press. A group of enthusiasts was also able to take part in a commemorative Nordic walking march. Initiatives such as this unite all members of the academic community, and organizing a grand student festival with a sports theme only underscores the importance of physical activity in life.

The AWF Futsal League is the largest year-round futsal (indoor football) league in Poland. Organized by the Student Government of the University School of Physical Education in Wrocław (named after Polish Olympians), the event—now in its 11th edition—runs from October to May and this year has gathered 327 players, representing over 10% of the university's total student body. Such a high level of active participation is rare, and the broad group of supporters cheering on the event is also worth mentioning. The finale takes place during AWFalia, the Academy's sports and recreational student festival, and annually attracts over 500 fans to the stands—including both students and university staff, who also take part in exhibition matches.

It is a perfect example of a long-term sports event that is developed year after year and effectively integrates a significant portion of the academic community.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis conducted by the authors concerning student culture and academic sport in Polish higher education institutions leads to the unequivocal conclusion that both these spheres constitute today not merely a supplement to the didactic process, but an integral and increasingly strategic part of academic life. The contemporary university is no longer merely a place for acquiring formal education; it has become a space for the multidimensional development of students' personalities, social competencies, artistic talents, and sporting potential. Culture and sport no longer function on the margins of academic life but have been permanently embedded in the missions and development strategies of many higher education institutions in Poland.

A comprehensive analysis has been conducted regarding the changes that have occurred over the years in the perception and support of student artists and athletes. Effective solutions and good practices implemented by universities in the area of student support have been highlighted.

The scope of the analysis also encompassed the sports and artistic space. Facilities of major importance to academic culture and sport were identified, and their significance for the university and students was emphasized.

The authors also attributed significant importance to implemented projects aimed at the development of student culture and academic sport. Examples of flagship projects at Polish universities were presented. The publication provided a comprehensive overview of many aspects regarding the functioning of student culture and academic sport in higher education in Poland, highlighting their impact on the academic community.





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