CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN HISTORICAL GAMES WORKSHOP

POLAND

Stanisław Krawczyk, Aleksandra Mochocka, Michał Mochocki, Piotr Sterczewski

Guest participation: Maria B. Garda

Prague, 21–22 November, 2022

Introduction

Stanisław Krawczyk

Technicalities

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History and internationalisation

History is very important in the Polish public sphere, and there are many historical games in Poland.

Game studies in Poland is quite internationalised. For instance:

Central and Eastern European Game Studies (CEEGS) conference: Kraków 2015, Lublin 2016, Kraków 2019

Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) conference: Kraków 2022

However, we have looked to the West much more than to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. This is true for historical games, game history, and game studies. So the CEEHG Workshop is much needed!

History in Polish games (before 1795)

Aleksandra Mochocka
Michał Mochocki

Pagan Slavs + early Poland ~before 1000 AD

Two major videogame series from the 1990s

Polanie (1996), MDF - single-player RTS ("Polish Warcraft")

Polanie II (2003), Reality Pump Studio - single and multiplayer RTS

Kajko i Kokosz (1994), Seven Stars - J. Christa's cartoons 2D adventure (CZ: Przihody z galske zeme)

 → a whole series of point'n'click, platform, adventure games based on the comic series

Common view in 1990s: <u>the global market is not interested in Polish culture and history</u>

Pagan Slavs + early Poland ~before 1000 AD

An unexpected breakthrough: *WITCHER 3: THE WILD HUNT* **(2015), CD Projekt Red**

→ **Slavic folklore sells!** (despite the heated disputes about the degree of its Slavicness)

Effect 1: Slavic themes proudly enter Polish game development

Eventide: Slavic Fable (2015), The House of Fables - HOPA, Slavic myths in modern world

Thea: The Awakening (2015), MuHa Games - turn-based strategy Slavic fantasy (authors openly cite Witcher 3 as a trendsetter)

Thea II: The Shattering (2019), MuHa Games

Ancestors Legacy (2018), Destructive Creations - historical RTS in 8th-13th c., Slavs one of 4 factions

Pagan Slavs + early Poland ~before 1000 AD

Effect 2: after Witcher 3, Polish government launches support programmes for gamedev

- also other state and local institutions join in supporting games about heritage/history

Dungeons of the Amber Griffin (2023), Frozengem Studio - FPP dungeon crawler (with local museum in Wejherowo, supported by Ministry of Culture - features local Kashubian folklore)

The End of the Sun (2023) - RPG (photogrammetry of museums!)

Other interesting new Slavic-themed projects:

Blacktail (2022), The Parasight - FPP action-adventure, witchcraft fantasy

Gord (2023), Covenant.dev - fantasy strategy

Pagan Slavs + early Poland ~before 1000 AD

Tabletop RPGs - all set in magical version of the Slavic world

Zły Cień: Kruki urojenia (Evil Shadow) (1995), J. Greczyszyn

Arkona (2003), S.Print   *Słowianie* (2018), Hengal

Board and card games

Stworze (2018), Underworld Kingdom (support of Patrimonium Europae foundation) - board game about mythical creatures influencing Slavic humans

Żercy (2018), A. Jagodziński - card game about pagan priests serving their tribal chiefs

Słowianie (2021), Alexander - village builder 8+

Slavic Games - RESEARCH

Tomasz Majkowski, literature/culture studies - on Slavic heritage and its politicisation

Majkowski, Tomasz Z. 2018. 'Geralt of Poland: The Witcher 3 Between Epistemic Disobedience and Imperial
Nostalgia'. *Open Library of Humanities* 4 (1). https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.216.
———. 2019. 'By Svarog! Slavic Game Renaissance and the Ideology of the Extreme Right'. *DiGRA 2019
Proceedings*.

Michał Sołtysiak, archaeology

- on archeology and medieval history in game design, and on history of medieval games (Viking, mostly)

only Polish publications

Kingdom of Poland in 11th-16th c.

Krzyżacy (=The Teutons) (2002), Cenega - military strategy

Polish Empire: from the Teutons to the Deluge (2010), Cenega - PL version of RU *Reign: Conflict of Nations*, with 26 warring factions 14th-17th centuries

Ancestors Legacy (2018), Destructive Creations - RTS set in 8th-13th c., Slavs one of 4 factions

Polish videogames on non-Polish medieval history

Medieval Dynasty (2020), Render Cube - life sim with survival and strategy

Rustler (Grand Theft Horse) (2021), Jutsu Games - medieval thug open-world action game

Manor Lords (soon), Slavic Magic - strategy RTS

Kingdom of Poland in 11th-16th c.

Waterworks! (2020), Armor Games - - construction & management sim of medieval town waterworks (with Univ. of Gdansk archaeologist and support from Ministry of Science)

- based on W. Kulczykowski's academic research and used by him in education; the History department at Univ. of Gdańsk uses historical games as well as game design in their education

Witcher 3 (2015), again - Kingdom of Redania (especially in game lore) styled upon medieval Poland

Nondigital games about medieval Poland

small tactical and strategic games about war with the Teutonic knights 14-15th c., including simplistic centennial merchandise for the 600th anniversary in 2010

11th-16th Poland Games - RESEARCH

none whatsoever?

we didn't find any publication researching Polish games about Polish medieval history

– the closest match would be research on foreign games that feature Poland among other medieval countries, such as *Age of Empires* or *Medieval II: Total War* or *Crusader Kings II*, but still nothing that would be focused on Polish culture, history or heritage

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth 1569-1795

Szlak Sobieskiego (2012), Calaris Studio - free browser MMORPG (local govts Rybczewice et al)

Skarb Sobieskiego (2014), Calaris Studio - free action-adventure (like above, local heritage & tourism)

Hearts of Stone (2015), CD Projekt Red - DLC to *Witcher 3*

Korona Rzeczypospolitej (2020), Frost3D Games - free browser MMORPG (The Princes Lubomirsky Foundation - Fundacja Książąt Lubomirskich)

Hellish Quart (2021), Kubold - fencing simulator + story mode (forthcoming)

The Deluge (2015), Polish community-created mod to *Mount & Blade* - tactical RPG

Polish edition of the UA *Mount & Blade: With Fire & Sword* based on TR *M&B: Warband*

The Deluge II (in development) - another mod, this time to *Mount & Blade: Bannerlord*

BEAST (in development), False Prophet - turn-based tactical + RPG, grimdark version of the 1590s

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth 1569-1795

Dzikie Pola (1997), MAG; 2nd ed. (2005), Max Pro - tabletop RPG → RPG community → LARPs

VETO! (2004+), Krakowska Grupa Kreacyjna; 2nd ed. (2007), Imperium - CCG → CCG scene

Boże Igrzysko (2010), Phalanx Games - PL version of GB *God's Playground* (2009)

By Fire and Sword (2012), Wargamer - miniature wargame → wargaming community

special:

PLC roleplaying extended to sustained involvement in other heritage practices

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth 1569-1795

long-term effect of *Dzikie Pola* RPG

DzP players got involved in reenactment, education, other PLC-set games, heritage events and grant projects, including edu-games & role-plays

case in point: Pospolite Ruszenie Szlachty Ziemi Krakowskiej / Projekt Rekreator

NGO specialising in historical and civic education via larps, RPG, board games, RH events

e.g. *Project DEMOcracy* (2012), funded by Swiss-Polish Cooperation Programme, 1100+ junior high school students in ~50 larps about 17-th c. parliamentarism for civic education

e.g. *MyRazem* (2022), project uniting PL and UA youth around our shared history in the PLC

PLC 1569-1795 Games - RESEARCH

Michał Mochocki, literature & heritage studies

Jakub Majewski, media & heritage studies

- on heritage in worldbuilding and on historical role-plays as heritage practice

Mochocki, Michał. 2011. 'Sarmackie Dziedzictwo Kulturowe w Grze Fabularnej Dzikie Pola'. *Homo Ludens* 3 (1): 139–54.

———. 2017. 'Gry Sarmackie w Ujęciu Anglosaskich Heritage Studies'. *Homo Ludens*, no. 10: 153–90.

———. 2021. *Role-Play as a Heritage Practice: Historical LARP, Tabletop RPG and Reenactment*. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge.

Mochocki, Michał, and Łukasz Wrona. 2013. 'DEMOcracy Project: Larp in Civic Education'. In *KoLa - Larp Conference 2013*, edited by Jakub Tabisz, 20–28. Wrocław: Wielosfer.

Majewski, Jakub. 2017. 'The Potential for Modding Communities in Cultural Heritage'. In *The Interactive Past: Archaeology, Heritage & Video Games*, edited by Angenitus Arie Andries Mol, Csilla E. Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke, Krijn H. J. Boom, and Aris Politopoulos, 73–82. Leiden: Sidestone Press.

PLC 1569-1795 Games - RESEARCH

Historical Settings as Transmedia Storyworlds Across Fiction, Tabletop RPG, Live-Action Role-Plays and Video Games. Theory and Case Studies Through the Lenses of Narratology and Heritage Discourses - **research grant OPUS 2020/39/B/HS2/01999**

Michał Mochocki, Paweł Schreiber, Jakub Majewski - Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego

Summing up the 9th-18th c. part

Pagan Slavic / early Poland up to ~1000 AD

- video games: relatively unpopular before 2015, boost from 2015
- analog games: relatively unpopular in tabletop RPG, rising popularity after 2015 in board games
- main themes: Slavic mythology, folklore and magic
- research: underresearched - only T. Majkowski repeatedly writes on Slavic heritage in games
- potential research: expected due to the rising trend on the market

Summing up the 9th-18th c. part

Medieval Poland 11th-16th c.

- videogames: more PL-made games about general Europe (not PL)
- analog games: small-scale tactical cardboard wargames plus cheap merchandise for the 600th anniversary of the Tannenberg 1410 victory
- main theme: PL wars against Teutonic knights 14-15th c.
- research: we found no research on PL games about PL medieval history

Summing up the 9th-18th c. part

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth 1569-1795
- video games: relatively popular in 2010s, some non-commercial
- analog games: noticeable continuity from tabletop RPG *Dzikie Pola* to *VETO* CCG and historical education and heritage practices
- main themes: warfare; politics; cultural heritage of PLC nobility
- relatively well-researched - systematically by M. Mochocki, occasionally by T. Majkowski, J. Majewski, Ł. Wrona, J. Szeja, K. Łopatecki
- OPUS grant on historical settings as storyworlds (Mochocki et al.)
- OPUS grant on Polish videogames in national context (Majkowski et al.)

History in Polish games (1795–1989)

Piotr Sterczewski

Three main groups of games:

- depictions of armed conflicts (wars and uprisings) between Poland (or Polish combatants) and enemies; two main kinds: simulational wargames and identity-building, educational games aiming for a wide audience
- family-oriented games focused on everyday life during a historical period or "lighter" conflicts (mostly the communist rule, 1945–1989, and to a smaller extent the interwar period 1918–1939)
- simple educational games (quizzes, memory games) focused on national content

1795–1918: partitions and uprisings

Powstanie Styczniowe: Gra Strategiczna

- ca. 15 tabletop wargames depicting the period (mostly three anti-Russian uprisings, Napoleonic era, and WW1)
- one digital game on the January Uprising of 1863
- a few identity-building titles, mostly related to regaining independence in 1918

Rok 1863

Niepodległa

Outliers: *Revolution 1905, Krakow Trail of Women*

- *Revolution 1905*: multi-faction depiction of workers' strikes (Polish chapter of revolution in the Russian Empire); rather negative depiction of the Church and the nationalist faction
- *Krakow Trail of Women*: suffragettes and women's rights activists in late 19th/early 20th century Kraków
- rare explorations of class and gender; both games depict identities beyond the national; both released non-commercially by leftist/feminist NGOs


Rewolucja 1905

Krakowski Szlak Kobiet

1918–1939: post-WW1 border wars, Polish-Bolshevik war, interwar period

- several games depicting struggle for establishing borders after WW1; Polish-Bolshevik war of 1920 a particularly popular topic
- state-sponsored game jam about the Polish-Bolshevik war (1920 Jam)
- a few games inspired by non-military aspects of the period (*Letnisko, MS Batory*)
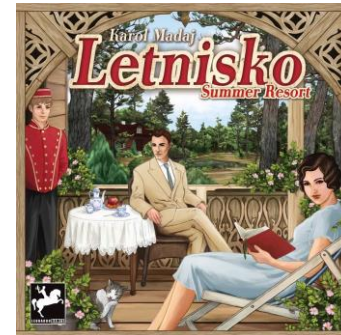
World War 2

- central both to Polish memory culture and Polish historical games
- dozens of wargames, numerous identity-building titles
- a bunch of digital games (*Fall Weiss*, *Uprising44: Silent Shadows*, Enemy Front, *Land of War: The Beginning*, Warsaw, *My Memory of Us*)
- many board games published by state institutions, most notably the Institute of National Remembrance
- focus on notions of heroism, victimhood/martyrdom, Polish contribution to Allied war struggle; contentious issues (antisemitism, fighting alongside the Soviet Union) largely a taboo

Communist rule (1945–1989)

- mostly light, family-oriented tabletop games; *Kolejka* (*The Queue*) the most influential title
- main themes: everyday life, Solidarity-related opposition, "cursed soldiers" (post-WW2 anti-communist guerilla)
- both (supposedly) common opposition against the system and nostalgia towards everyday life of the era; Polish version of "Ostalgie"
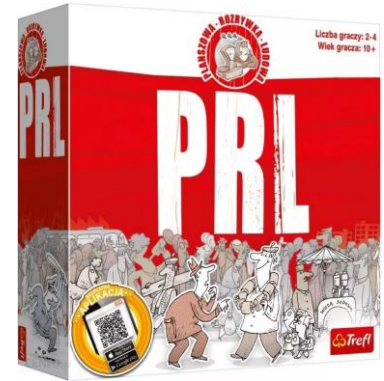
Existing research

- focus on individual games, general texts on potential of games as heritage and education

- my research: mnemonic hegemony of Polish games; discursive devices arguing for specific views on Polish history and identity; universalization and marginalization

Game preservation and heritage in Poland
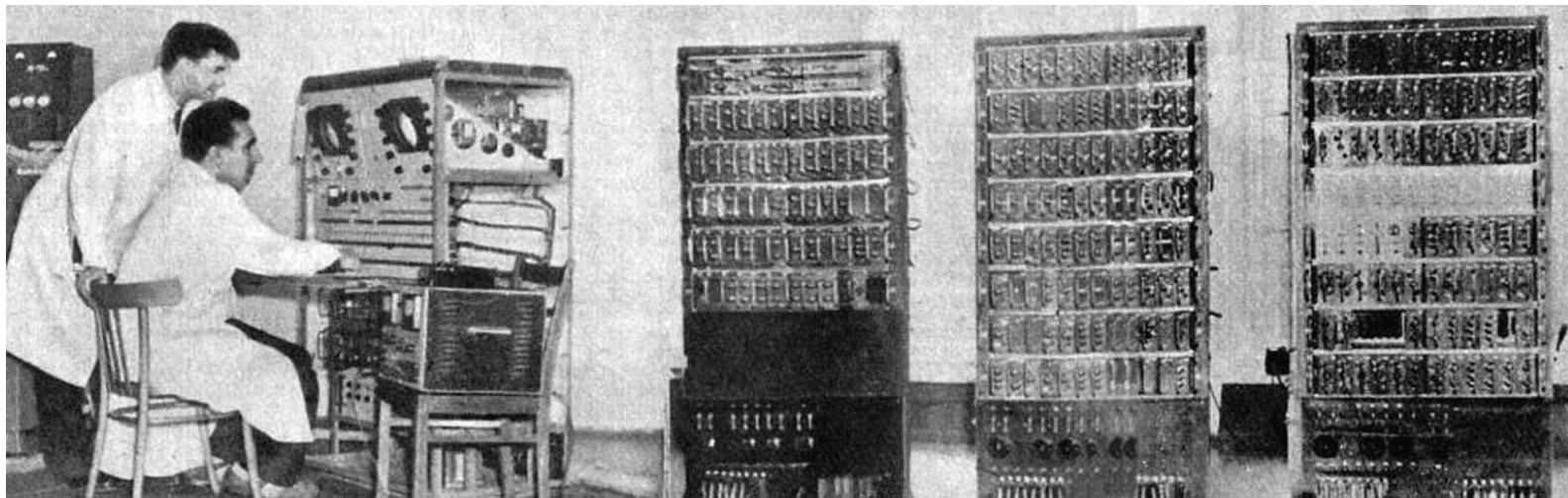
Maria B. Garda

Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies

ACADEMY OF FINLAND

CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Tampere University

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

Nordic Alliance for Sustainability in Gaming

Nordplus

Greening Games

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.

cost
EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Funded by the European Union

NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMANITIES

Republic of Poland

Polish Digital Games Heritage (1958–2025)

Grassroots of Digital Europe: from Historic to Contemporary Cultures of Creative Computing

History of Polish Computer Games

***Tic-tac-toe* (Miś 1958/60)** made for the 1st Polish universal digital machine XYZ (team lead by Leon Łukasiewicz at Bureau of Calculations and Programs of the Mathematical Apparatus Department of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 1958).

First Polish Commercial Game

Web Master **(Dybski, Bednawski 1983**) written in Assembler for the 8-bit Atari platform

Solidarność
W SAMO POŁUDNIE
4 CZERWCA 1989
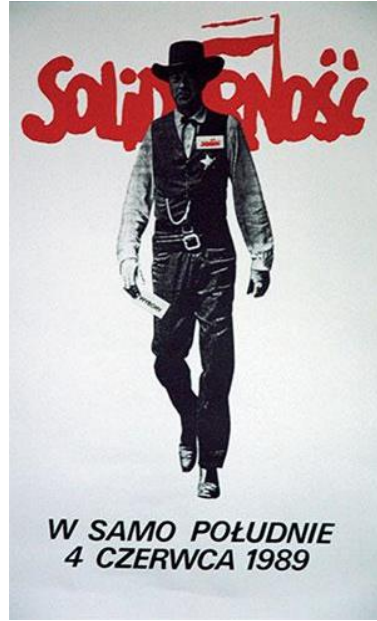
Democratic transition

The Fall of the Iron Curtain

- Regional narrative (former Eastern Bloc)
- Failed state projects (e.g. Mazovia)
- Technological and cultural lag
- Bottom-up computerization
- *Gaming the Iron Curtain* (Švelch 2018)
- Smuggling games and piracy
- "Playing and copying" (Wasiak 2014)
- The long 1980s: 1984-1994
- 1984: COCOM update
- 1989: fall of communism
- 1994: new copyright legislation

Queue of people willing to buy Timex computers in the scout depot near the editorial office of Świat Młodych in Warsaw, around 10th December 1986. Source: tok, "Komputer nie śledź," Świat Młodych, December 18, 1986, 1.

Piotr Sitarski, Maria B. Garda and Krzysztof Jajko (2020). New Media Behind the Iron Curtain. Cultural History of Video, Microcomputers and Satellite Television in Communist Poland. Cracow: Jagiellonian University Press.
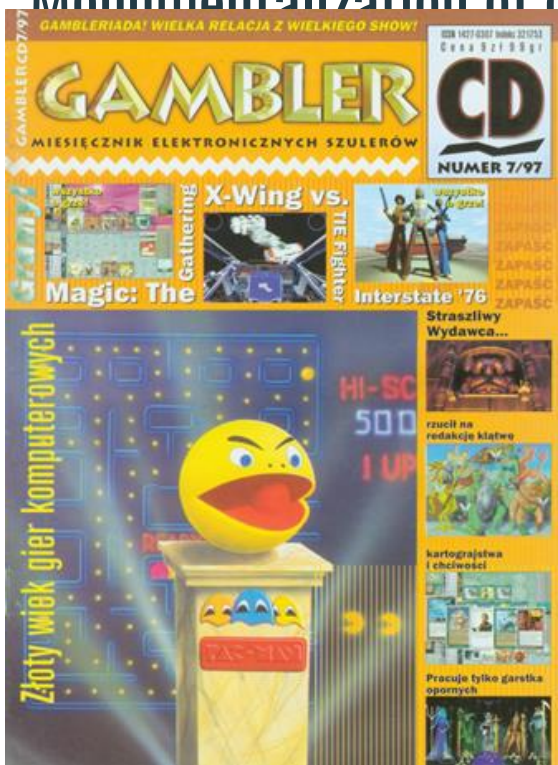
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Monumentalization of classic video games and hardware (1990s)

"Gambler" nr 7/97

Mariusz Gieparda's website – Museum of Old Computers – was an important hub for Polish collectors in the late 1990s and early 2000s (source: www.8bit.pl)

First retrogaming groups and exhibitions (2000s)

Nintendo platforms at the *Electronic Entertainment: Formerly and Nowadays* **in the Museum of the Opolian Silesia (2008)**. On the poster is Nintendo 64 Pokémon Edition, a console that was not very popular in Poland during its commercial lifecycle (1996–2003). Screen shot from the TV coverage (Kurier Opolski). Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6odkvixYqU&index=5&list=PLF075FC23EC249AA1

Towards institutionalization of game heritage (2010s)

- Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Zabytków Informatyki 'Kompik', Katowice (2009)

- Retrogralnia, Wrocław (2011)

- Muzeum Historii Komputerów i Informatyki, Katowice (2012)

- Fundacja Promocji Retroinformatyki 'Dawne Komputery i Gry', Kraków-Łódź (2014)

- Muzeum Gry i Komputery Minionej Ery, Wrocław (2017)

- Polskie Towarzystwo Ochrony Dziedzictwa Technicznego (2022)

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Polish game heritage landscape today

- Limited and *ad hoc* collaboration between selected groups of stakeholders

- Limited recognition of video game heritage, focus on game sector profits in public discourse

- Early stages of institutionalization and mostly on regional levels (e.g. private museums and hobbyist associations, temporal exhibitions in memory institutions)

- No systematic research on game preservation and standardization efforts

- National history politics and preservation of communist era heritage

Final remarks

Stanisław Krawczyk

Gaps and omissions

In historical games:

other countries in the region presented usually in a simplifying manner, often as enemies

in analog games: significant interest in the land of Dzikie Pola (parts of today's Ukraine and Russia)

In historical game studies:

little interest in the region of Central and Eastern Europe

lIttle interest in theory and methodology

notable change: grant-funded team projects in recent years

hopefully, with this workshop, a new chapter will start!