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Citation: Mercik, J. 2024. History on the Game Board: The Use of Board Games in Polish History Education. *Public History Review*, 31, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.5130/phrj.v31i0.8508>

ISSN 1833-4989 | Published by UTS ePRESS | <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/phrj>

History on the Game Board: The Use of Board Games in Polish History Education

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5130/phrj.v31i0.8508>

Article History: Received 04/01/2023; Revised 21/03/2024; Accepted 21/03/2024; Published 09/06/2024

In recent years, public history has become very popular in Poland.¹ It is common to combine anniversary celebrations with historical events organized for entire families wishing to spend attractive leisure time. Such events are organized both on a statewide and local government scale in places like cities, counties, suburbs and villages.² A variety of tools are being used to popularize history in the public space from magazines and books to movies, TV series and TV shows to computer and board games.³ Games that are associated with leisure, fun and entertainment attract the interest of both children and adults.

Popular board games are widely used by cultural and scientific institutions ranging from museums and scientific institutes to libraries and community centers.⁴ They make use of current titles available on the market but also create their own products and organize dedicated activities for students, visit schools with lectures and demonstrations and invite students to tournaments.⁵ Thanks to such attractive initiatives, games are increasingly being used in historical education in school lessons and extracurricular activities, as well as at universities.⁶

This article describes popular game titles used in history education in Poland. In the first part, games designed by the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) are presented, along with examples of their use and feedback from students.⁷ The second part of the article discusses the global bestselling game *Twilight Struggle* along with a case study of its use with history students. The purpose of the article is to point out the possibilities of game-based learning of historical education and, above all, to indicate the applications of board games in the academic training of teachers who later create school reality with their work.⁸

In undertaking research on the educational potential of board games, surveys were conducted with both high school students and history students who majored in teaching.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTEREST The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. **FUNDING** The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

A total of 53 students were surveyed during workshops conducted at schools on the realities of social life in communist Poland. The survey was anonymous and consisted of four open-ended questions. During course activities with students in 2021-2022, 37 surveys consisting of questions on the state of knowledge before and after playing the selected board game discussed in the article were conducted. The survey was supplemented by interviews conducted with students, and a total of 20 in-depth interviews were conducted on feelings and emotions about the games-based learning method. The results of the study are discussed later in the article.

History Teacher Training in Poland

History teachers in Poland are trained at universities primarily under the Bologna system. According to the 2019 teacher training standard, in order to be qualified to work at school, one must obtain a master's degree, that is, complete first a three-year bachelor's degree and then a two-year complementary master's degree. Today, graduating from a history degree program in Poland with a specialization in teaching, one can usually teach three subjects at school: history, social studies and the new subject history and the present.

Polish schools have recently undergone another reform changing their structure. Junior secondary schools, which had been in operation since 1999, were abolished: a two-tier education structure consisting of an eight-grade elementary school and a secondary school and a four-year high school or a five-year technical school was reintroduced. School history education does not have a good reputation with students and is listed among the top subjects that are difficult and boring at the same time. As a result, history is being chosen less and less as a high school graduation subject and later as a college major. There is a clear gap between the growing popularity of public history and interest in school and academic history.⁹ Thus, it seems so significant to equip a new generation of teachers with the skills to use public history tools in the classroom to help modernize and make school history education more attractive and remove the burden of encyclopedism.¹⁰

Board Games Recreating Everyday Life in 1980s Poland

A government office that makes effective use of public history tools is the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) which was established in 1999. It pays great attention to popularizing history among students by organizing lessons and workshops, field activities, rallies, competitions and training for teachers. It prepares numerous educational materials using the board game format, and makes selected titles available online as well.¹¹

The most successful game to date has been *Kolejka*, developed in 2011 by Karol Madej, which was sold already in the first two years in an edition of more than one hundred thousand copies (Figure1). To date, *Kolejka* has been translated into English, German, Russian, Japanese, Spanish, French and Romanian.¹² The object of the game is to investigate the reality of social life in the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) where a centrally planned economy caused store shelves to shine with emptiness and consumers were stuck in long queues waiting for a throw of goods. Since the second half of the 1970s, queues have become a permanent feature of Polish streets.

The realities of life in a communist country are very well described in the game's instructions by Andrzej Zawistowski. He introduces players to the atmosphere of the era in which it was normal for customers to queue first and then ask the typical questions of the era: 'what do they give here?', 'what did they throw?' or 'what is this queue for?' Priority in line was given to people with disabilities, pregnant women and mothers with small children which caused disruption in the store. In an effort to combat this, queue committees were formed to oversee order and watch the way in which people entered the stores. Of course, queues did not apply to party activists who also had special, better-equipped stores. In such an atmosphere, purchases

flourished ‘from under the counter’ or ‘from behind the counter’, taking place outside official distribution and based on acquaintances. The system was conducive to the development of abuses especially cronyism. It was good to know someone ‘who has access’ such as salesmen, store managers or people in authority. Speculation, that is, trading in goods obtained illegally and sold at inflated prices, flourished on a massive scale.¹³

The game’s instructions introduces us to this atmosphere from the first pages in a few sentences of text stylized in the propaganda language of party-government messages warning players: ‘We kindly inform you that the moment you open the box you have found yourself in 1980s Poland,’ therefore, ‘Please do not panic and calmly take your place in queue. Delivery is on the way, and maybe there will be enough goods for everyone.’ It also includes numerous archival photographs of people standing in long lines, empty store shelves and customers proudly wearing ‘wreaths’ made of toilet paper rolls around their necks. The game is designed for two to five people aged twelve and up, but younger students can handle it too. Each player gets a set of wooden pawns in a different color forming members of his family whose goal is to get all the items listed on a random shopping list with a specific task (Figure1). The player who completes the list first wins but the matter is not so simple.



Figure 1. *Kolejka* game board. Available <https://edukacja.ipn.gov.pl/edu/materialy-edukacyjne/gry/gry-planszow/93066,Kolejka.html> [Accessed: 28 December 2022]

In keeping with historical realities, players place their pawns into store queues, not knowing which of the five stores the goods will reach, whether there will be enough for everyone, whether the store manager will open the store or perhaps organize a stock taking, or perhaps have to look for goods in the bazaar from speculators. The product cards feature photos of sixty original products from the communist era. Among the goods are Relax shoes, Przemysławka cologne, Popularna tea and other goods that were usually in short supply. While standing in queues, queue cards are available to players, reflecting mechanisms familiar from

history and well characterized in the Instruction.¹⁴ The ‘colleague in the Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party’ card allows you to suspect two more supply cards and plan the spacing of family members on the next day; the ‘mother with a child in her arms’ card allows the player to move his pawn to the beginning of the queue; the ‘goods from under the counter’ card gives you an immediate chance to take goods home if the player stands first in queue (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Cards from the English-language version of *Kolejka* game. Available: https://www.history.org.uk/library/1503/0000/0022/International_Journal_of_Historical_Learning_Teaching_and_Research_12.2.pdf#page=161 (Accessed: 28 December 2022)

The game’s mechanics are great at bringing out the excitement in players, as we are amusingly warned about in the Instruction: ‘We regret to inform you that due to the subject matter covered, the game may cause negative emotions in emotionally sensitive people. Rare cases of tears, helplessness, gnashing of teeth and symptoms of gratuitous malice were found.’ In fact, students of history during the games reacted emotionally to the course of the game. There was frustration and anger but also joy after getting the needed

goods. Such reactions from players encouraged them to empathize with history, to generally understand that people in the past lived in different circumstances and therefore experienced and interpreted the world through a different belief system.¹⁵ Confirmation of the above theses can be found in the opinions of students. Below, there are examples of opinions written down during the interviews:

Empty shelves, canceled deliveries and a long queue in front of a closed store - frustration is the best word.

I felt a great sense of injustice of fate and helplessness against the system.

Playing *Kolejka* reminded me of the stories of my parents and my grandmothers and grandfathers. Until now I knew these images from Bareja films now I could experience them.

I already know that in the People's Republic of Poland, without acquaintance, you might not even have had toilet paper.

During the game, I felt that I had moved back to the times of People's Poland and was struggling to find the most necessary articles to furnish my apartment from the allotment or to celebrate my grandchild's first holy communion.

I do not know all the products in the cards, but I remember Pani Walewska cream from my grandmother's bathroom blue flacon.

Relax shoes, which are popular today, were worn by my grandfather in communist Poland, this surprised me.

Very easy to use and intuitive game.

Kolejka Game is a great example of historical reconstruction on the board.

Reading the students' opinions, we see that although the *Kolejka* board game is not a typical example of historical reenactment, it certainly confronts players with similar cognitive challenges experienced by those standing in queues.¹⁶ De facto, a similar mechanism is observed among computer game players, in which there are also no real experiences, and are interpreted by researchers as a form of historical reenactment.¹⁷ Experiencing history is facilitated by additional enhancement of the atmosphere, for example, by parallel listening to music from the communist period, such as Krystyna Prońko's iconic song 'Psalm of those standing in queue':

What does this queue stand for?

After it is dark, after it is dark, after it is dark

What are you waiting for in that queue

In old age, in old age, in old age

What will you buy when you get there?

Fatigue, fatigue, fatigue

What will you bring home? Stone doubt

Be like a stone, stand, endure

Someday these stones will move

And they will fly like an avalanche

Through the night through the night through the night.¹⁸

After a year of mentoring classes in board games with students, I led board workshops at a high school (Figure 3). During such a meeting, the optimal time for one game of *Kolejka* is two lesson units (90 minutes). Usually the class has about twenty-five people so five separate tables of five were created. Presenting the game in a small group encourages the development of critical thinking skills through analysis, synthesis and evaluation to develop new knowledge and draw conclusions.¹⁹ With a small group and simple rules, the students learned the mechanics of the game in a few minutes and were able to start it quickly.²⁰ During the game, a student sat at each table acting as content coordinator, decider and speculator at the same time. During the game, that student conducted a historical narrative introducing the students to the atmosphere of the era, informing them about the object of the game and placing it in time and space. The students most enjoyed the stories told when the queue push cards were played, especially the jokes from those years serving as an excellent summary of the game: ‘What if there was no communist Poland – Everything!’; ‘What’s a queue? – A socialist approach to the store.’

Two elements were mentioned in post-game interviews. The first was great excitement among the young people and satisfaction with such a formula of lessons defined by them as learning through play. Most often



Figure 3. School *Kolejka* Playoffs 10 June 2022. Available: Photo from the author’s collection.

they formulated the opinion that: ‘This is how I can learn history’, and ‘This kind of history is not boring.’ The second element was recognizing the potential of game-based learning of history. The students stressed that the communist period was completely abstract and difficult to imagine for them; they did not know the concept of speculator, goods from under the counter, planned economy or Pewex before the game. Meanwhile, after one game, they were able to construct a meaningful statement on the characteristics of social life in People’s Poland in the 1980s in which they used the right concepts, quoted anecdotes and reconstructed the atmosphere of the era.²¹

The validity of the above observations resulting from conversations held with students is confirmed by the results of an anonymous survey. A total of 53 students took part in the workshop. In the first stage before the game, they answered two questions. The first one was about words associated with the socialist economy and the second about distinctive items possible to buy during the time of the People’s Poland.

The second stage of the survey took place after the four-hour workshop had already been played, after familiarization with the game’s mechanics, cards and instructions. At that moment the students were asked four questions in total. The first two sounded exactly the same, while the third and fourth questions dealt with students’ emotions during the game and historical empathy.

The results were as follows. In the first part of the survey, 100% of respondents gave no answers to both questions. This situation seems understandable for two reasons. First of all, the questions concerned a distant period in which the students were not alive and which was the time of their parents’ or one of their grandparents’ youth. Secondly, the topics of this period are implemented in history lessons as one of the last in the educational cycle of elementary school, and often there is no more time, so they are simply skipped or covered in a highly selective manner.

The situation was definitely better already in the second stage of the survey. This time, the first question about the economic situation was answered by 100% of the students. 87% (46 students) listed a minimum of four associations with the economy of the People’s Poland. The most common were: queues indicated 100% (53 students), poverty – 94% (50 students), ration cards – 90% (48 students), speculator – 85% (45 students). In the second question regarding specific products from this period, at least three products were mentioned by 100% (53 students). Vinegar was listed first by 96% (51 students), alcohol by 90% (48 students) and a chocolate-like product by 80% (42 students). In the question regarding emotions, the most frequently mentioned emotions were, in order: fear/anxiety – 18% (13 students) and frustration – 16% (8 students). More than 10% also named emotions and states: sadness, fatigue, stress.

The last question on historical empathy consisted of two parts. In part A, students indicated whether they experienced this emotion during the game, while in part B they had to name or describe any feelings. The results turned out to be very optimistic. 80% (48 students) were able to identify specific feelings they experienced after the game thinking about people living in such a world. They mentioned primarily sympathy, while they individually described their emotions and experiences using vocabulary characteristic of their teenage years.

Living at that time, I would have gone nuts.

Fun game, but such a life must have been terrible.

It’s a fustercluck to live like that.

A sharp ride of a lifetime spent in line.

After the great success of *Kolejka*, IPN created other game titles based on the realities of life in the People’s Poland, including the *Reglamentacja* game – a coupon game.²² It brings players closer to the coupon system, allowing only those with vouchers in addition to money for the goods in question to make

purchases. In practice, even if you had coupons, you could not buy the item you needed because of constant shortages of supplies. The goal of the game is to shop before the announced visit of guests. Unfortunately, in the winter of 1983, goods in the store are rationed, and ration coupons often do not correspond to what you need to buy.

The game includes a mini-booklet of notebook format describing in a very accessible way the times of the coupon system enriched with numerous archival photographs. These historical additions to the Instruction do an excellent job of introducing the atmosphere of the era. The rules and historical description are written in a very simple, clear language and contain a lot of examples and anecdotes which definitely make it easier to remember. In both *Kolejka* and *Reglamentacja*, the focus is on exploring the economics, distribution and allocation of scarce resources.²³ Players quickly realize that success depends on the efficient exchange of coupons with others standing in queue. In this negotiation game, trading takes place only within a minute measured by a spinning wooden spinner. Such a simple solution perfectly captures the escaping time by raising the temperature of the game.

In talking with students after the games, one can see the difference in their ability to experience and feel emotions in the *Kolejka* and *Reglamentacja* games. Long queues associated with sales or promotions for a new model of iPhone give them comparative material with the gist of the *Kolejka* game, harder for them with the modern analogy of the card system presented in *Reglamentacja*, in which even having money and being in a store with goods on the shelf, one could not buy them due to the limit being exceeded. The situation changed after Russia's attack on Ukraine and the resulting problems with supply continuity. Now, they immediately think of a comparison to the problem of buying coal for fuel or some groceries. Similar examples are cited from the pandemic and lockdown period which caused an interruption of supply and temporary shortages in stores of, for example, toilet paper or sugar.

The popularity of games depicting the reality of life at that time, on the one hand, is due to their good mechanics and playability, but also to the period sentiment of Poles, especially those whose youth fell during that period. With the games, one can see a return to design and fashion of the era, such as furniture and Relax shoes. This is signaled especially by students pointing to the game as an inspiring discovery of a return to the past. Today's young people are curious about the history of a bygone era in which a different system operated, known to them only from movies, TV series or the stories of their parents and grandparents. Hence, the often-mentioned phrase that board games about the People's Republic of Poland bring generations together, by reliving history together over the board, by reminiscing and talking at home about how and when it was, by looking at photos and memorabilia together. It is worth mentioning that the demand for games from the communist period has also decided to take advantage of other entities. For example, the Egmont publishing house has released the game *Pan tu nie stał*, as well as *Cinkciarze* and *Demoludy*. Repeated opinions in student surveys, also strongly emphasizing the integrating and bonding qualities of board games, are presented below:

The classes inspired me to buy the game. This is what our evenings look like now. Grandmother's memories priceless.

This game can improve the relationship between parents and children.

Kolejka game is an excellent way to learn through play and to integrate the group (class).

Board Game for the Youngest

Following the success of *Kolejka* at IPN, the board game department has grown. Today, more than a dozen have been published and new ones are still being created.²⁴ These include interesting games for the youngest, such as the hit *Miś Wojtek* game, recommended for players aged six and over, created by Karol Madej who

developed *Kolejka*.²⁵ The game tells the remarkable story of a bear who became a soldier. In a brief historical description, students learn that in September 1939 Poland was attacked by both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (USSR). In 1941, after Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Stalin agreed to form a Polish army from Poles deported and imprisoned in labor camps. In March 1942, Polish soldiers and civilians led by General Władysław Anders left the USSR to support British forces in the fight against the Germans. On their way to Iran, the soldiers bought a small non-jihadist boy from a boy they met, named him Wojtek and conscripted him into the Polish army. Wojtek walked the entire combat route with his soldiers from Iran, through Palestine, Egypt, Italy and all the way to Scotland. He shared their woes, joys and sorrows, giving them many opportunities to smile and help them in their time of need. He guarded the equipment, and during the Battle of Monte Cassino he donated ammunition to the soldiers.

The game board is a simplified map of Europe with the Polish II Corps battle route marked, along which players move wooden pawns in the shape of a bear by playing city and bear cards (Figure 4). The object of the game is to take your pawn along the route from the camps in the USSR to Edinburgh, Scotland, and collect six different teddy bear cards of the chosen type. Once again, care has been taken to provide excellent instructions containing a wealth of historical knowledge given in an extremely attractive manner adapted to the age and cognitive abilities of students, such as a description of the Battle of Monte Cassino.

In Poland, both history and Polish language teachers use the game, because in the second grade of elementary school, one of the readings is a book introducing the fate of Wojtek Bear.²⁶ The whole story is very much enjoyed by children and arouses great curiosity. Children ask a very large number of historical questions of various types. Some examples taken from conversations with parents in my then eight-year-old daughter's class are: *What was the war? Why did the Poles find themselves so far away from Poland? Who*



Figure 4. *Miś Wojtek* Game Board Available: <https://edukacja.ipn.gov.pl/edu/materialy-edukacyjne/gry/gry-planszow/82248,Mis-Wojtek.html> (Accessed: 28 December 2022)

fought on Monte Cassino and where did the Poles come from there? There are questions about armaments in the context of the missiles that Wojtek delivered on itself, as well as about specific individuals and their role in the journey. There are eight character cards in the game, including General Władysław Sikorski, General Władysław Anders and Major Antoni Chełkowski. The game was released simultaneously in dual language versions in Polish and English.

I interviewed parents about their state of knowledge and how much they learned and remembered from the game. It is worth noting that the people interviewed were not professional historians, and often for them the game's subject matter was previously unknown history. During the game they were helped by the Internet. They always had a smartphone with them and immediately sought answers to the children's questions about specific facts, people or the fate of *Miś Wojtek*, among others. Respondents also pointed to their strong excitement and that of their children in discovering the whole story in finding archival photographs of places, people featured in the game and, of course, *Miś* itself.²⁷ We also noticed this trend in movies, TV series and non-fiction books. The inclusion of photos and additional information about the characters at the end is much loved by the audience and adds to the appeal of the production.

Taking advantage of the popularity of the bear's adventures, IPN is organizing 'Miś Wojtek' Polish Educational Board Game Tournament for all Polish schools around the world (Figure 5).²⁸ The games are organized online. Schools submit two-person teams of children between the ages of eight and sixteen. In the 2022 school year, sixty-one teams from nineteen countries participated in the regional competition, including the United States, Italy, Iceland, Canada, Turkey, Qatar, Egypt and Spain. 2023 featured 120



Figure 5. Inauguration of the final games of the *Miś Wojtek* board game tournament, May 10, 2022. Photo Piotr Życieński (IPN) Available: <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosc/164248,Inauguracja-finalowych-rozgrywek-turnieju-gry-lanszowej-Mis-Wojtek.html> (Accessed: 28 December 2022)

teams. Forty teams selected in an online competition running from October to March 2023 advanced to the finals which were held in May 2023 in Warsaw.

Board Game for a Special Occasion: Anniversary Celebrations

The most complex game created by the IPN is the Independence game released in 2018 on the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of Poland's regaining of independence.²⁹ The game mechanics are cooperative and based on dice and cards (Figure 6 and 7). *Niepodległa* is designed for two to four players ages twelve and up. The action of the game covers the events of 1910-1920, with emphasis on the period from the outbreak of World War I to the regaining of Polish independence in 1918. The players take actions appropriate to the heroes of the struggle for independence: they try to spread the ideas of independence, seek national consensus and strengthen the position of Poland in the world. If they meet certain conditions, Poland will regain its independence in the grand finale of 1918. However, despite regaining its sovereignty, Poland may cease to exist if the players fail to meet the decisive challenges – the Paris Peace Conference, the work to establish a new state administration – as well as the struggle for borders – the uprisings in Greater Poland and Silesia and the Polish-Bolshevik war.

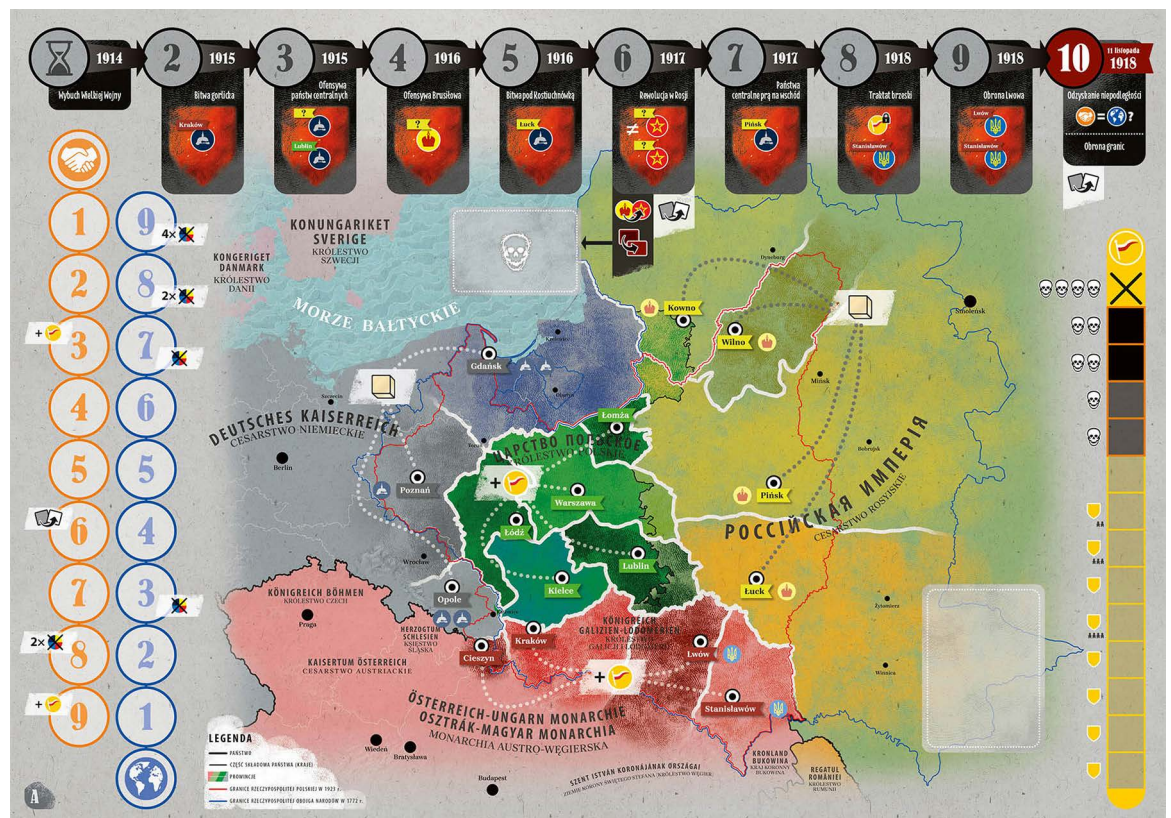


Figure 6. *Niepodległa* game board basic variant. Available: <https://edukacja.ipn.gov.pl/edu/materialy-edukacyjne/gry/gry-planszow/82236,Niepodlegla.html> [Accessed: 2 January 2023]

The entry threshold is higher than in previous titles. But it is worth noting that there are two variants available – a shorter basic one and a longer advanced one containing a more historically complex narrative. For both variants there are separate boards (the board is double-sided) which is a map of Europe with a reborn Poland placed on it. The game is traditionally accompanied by an interesting historical insert. (It is worth noting the very good quality workmanship of all elements.) In addition to basic information

about the game, the IPN website also includes instructions, a historical study and the excellent three-part memoir of the game's designer, Jan Madejski, which contains a wealth of valuable information and historical references.³⁰



Figure 7. Cards from *Niepodległa* game. Available: <https://edukacja.ipn.gov.pl/edu/materialy-edukacyjne/gry/gry-planszow/82236,Niepodlegla.html> (Accessed: 2 January 2023)

Educational Potential of the *Twilight Struggle* Board Game

In order to verify the global popularity of a board game, it is best to check a specific title in the international Board Games Geek (BGG) ranking. An iconic game many years in the first place in the overall BGG ranking (currently fourteenth) and still in the top three in the war games category is *Twilight Struggle* by Ananda Gupta and Jason Matthews. The game was published in 2005 by GMT Games LLC and reissued in Poland by Phalanx Publishing in 2019. It is one of the more successful board games in the world in 2006, winning International Gamers Awards in both Historical Simulation and General Strategy, two-players categories as well as Golden Geek Best in Wargame Winner and 2-Player Board Game Winner categories and many other awards. It is also one of my favorite games looking both from the position of the player and, above all, from the point of view of popularizing history and historical education. *Twilight Struggle* is a classic two-player game for people aged fourteen and older that takes more than two hours to play. The axis of the game's plot is a simulation of forty-five years of struggle for world domination between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America, which players try to win by gaining influence in the world and gaining allies. A discussion of the rules of the game can be found in the accompanying instruction. (I also recommend looking for it on YouTube where the creators of thematic channels present step-by-step example gameplay in a very accessible way.)

The *Twilight Struggle* board is a large world map with continents divided into seven regions: Europe, Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, Central America and South America. Each region is made up of interconnected strategy states and standard states (Figure 8). They are distinguished by the colours of the boxes in which their names, flags and level of stability are placed; the higher it is, the more difficult it is to change the political system of a country and its affiliation with one of the two blocs. Next to each country there is a field for placing your own tokens. However, to be able to place them, a player must already have markers in the chosen or neighboring country. Players need to be in the appropriate event to gain influence in further regions.



Figure 8. *Twilight Struggle* game board. Available: <https://www.rebel.pl/gry-planzowe/twilight-struggle-zimna-wojna-1945-1989-109617.html> (Accessed: 2 January 2023)

The occupation of individual countries is used to implement a strategy of gaining influence in specific regions. According to the chosen strategy one can be present in a region, control it and preferably dominate it. Each of the above-mentioned options in a particular region allows you to score a different number of points depending on when the card is played and the player's situation on the board. Tensions and pushback in the regions are the essence of the game in which players earn victory points by playing settlement cards for a selected area. The highest scoring area in Europe is the only area that, in the situation of gaining control in it and playing a Scoring card, gives an immediate victory. There is still have a chance to win in a couple of ways – by being the first to score twenty points or if the opponent raises the threat-defcon level to one thereby triggering a nuclear war and immediately losing.

The intention of the authors was to show nuclear weapons as synonymous with the annihilation of humanity. If the settlement is not reached in any of the above ways, the winner is the one who scores more points after the tenth round on the victory track.³¹ Successive rounds are marked on a stage track marked with images of the leaders of the superpowers. The first three rounds form the prelude stage and are marked with photographs of the leaders: Joseph Stalin, Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower. Then we enter the escalation stage in which we have four rounds and images of Nikita Khrushchev, John F. Kennedy, Leonid Brezhnev and Richard Nixon. The final stage of the apogee is the pictures of the three leaders Jimmy Carter, Ronald Regan and Mikhail Gorbachev. By placing their photographs on the board in each game, players gain the ability to identify the name with the person.

The game's greatest asset is its rendering of Cold War psychology and excellent mechanics based on cards divided into three types: American, Soviet and neutral (Figure 9). Each player at the beginning of the round receives cards from the corresponding stage of the game. The basic mechanism is to use our resources for various actions. Depending on what decision players make, they can use their own cards to expand their influence by deploying markers in selected countries, or they can consider a beneficial event from them. We

do not have such comfort in a situation where there are only opponent's cards left in the hand to be played. Thus, by playing them we face unfavorable consequences.



Figure 9. Sample cards from the *Twilight Struggle* game. Available: <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/12333/twilight-struggle> (Accessed: 2 January 2023)

The cards and the whole mechanics of the game create great excitement for players. For example, the cards relating to the Vietnam and Afghanistan wars were composed in such a way as to make players feel embroiled in a conflict from which they find it difficult to withdraw and which weakens them. In order to be able to leave Vietnam – the US player or Afghanistan – the USSR player must throw a six on the dice. The time passes, you wait for success getting bogged down in a devastating war and your opponent; in the meantime you get more and more entrenched. The students' comments after the game were very enthusiastic. They especially emphasized how much they felt the pressure to end the unnecessary conflict that was weakening them, how frustrated they were with every bad throw of the dice, how they felt more and more desperate with each successive attempt. Questions then arose among students and schoolchildren watching the game as to what a desperate leader, especially one with nuclear weapons, could do in such a situation? How little escalation is needed? Is it sometimes decided by chance, an unfavorable coincidence? The belief in the need for alliances such as NATO and international organizations like the UN was also prevalent after the game.

In *Twilight Struggle*, players are not left with only the information written on the cards because the game comes with Instructions. Apart from the list of rules, you will find a sample game but most importantly a comprehensive chapter entitled 'History on the cards'.³² Sixteen pages present a historical description of each card in the context of its role in the game. The passwords are arranged according to their order on

the list of cards that each player has at hand during the game which makes it easy to use. The years given in parentheses next to the entries indicate the year or period in which the person strongly influenced the situation in the region. All cards must be played, but it is up to the players to decide when they will use them, ratcheting up the tension of whether the plan will succeed and whether the opponent's move can be predicted. We can divide the cards in the game into several groups: character cards, organizations, doctrines, wars, events and space race, as well as selected weaponry and quotes.

In my academic work, I use the *Twilight Struggle* game in my elementary and secondary school history didactics and public history classes. After an initial discussion of the mechanics of the game, the students' task is to establish the facts and then conduct a comparative analysis of the Cold War historical content in the game with that in Polish school textbooks. The conclusions of their work are discussed in the group and are usually similar in all groups. From the in-depth interviews conducted among 20 final-year students, 100% intend to use the games-based learning method in their work. 95% say they will use the *Twilight Struggle* game in their work. Such a result can be considered highly satisfactory. Below, there are examples of opinions written down during the interviews:

One game implements the school's material on recent universal history.

With this game, students will understand history.

The *Twilight Struggle* game is a reconstruction of the Cold War.

Thanks to this game, all of a sudden, facts, dates, numbers and people formed a coherent story in my head. I have the feeling that while playing I went back in time and relived history.

I would very much like to learn the history of the Cold War in school from the *Twilight Struggle* game and not from an encyclopedia. After this game, I feel that the facts have settled in my mind. I see what is happening at a particular time on all continents – I reconstructed history.

In addition to digesting historical facts, playing *Twilight Struggle* provides a chance to feel the atmosphere of the period – the tensions of the struggle for influence and domination. Playing games on a board presenting the whole world, players develop spatial imagination, acquire familiarity with the map and, learning about all strategic countries one by one, realize how a rash action can trigger a world conflict, including a nuclear one, and lead to frightening consequences. For historians, a very valuable advantage of the game is the combination of text and image by including a photograph on each card. In addition, photographs of the leaders of the superpowers are placed on the board.

The students emphasize that the level of knowledge of elementary school students gained through this game will be highly satisfactory, similarly in secondary school for those with history at the elementary level. For students with extended history, the game will be a great complement and a fantastic way to consolidate the news and use it in typical and unusual situations. Lecturing on modern history in other courses such as media culture and cultural studies, I also see how game-based learning perfectly allows students to feel the emotions, experience the hardship of the decisions made and their possible decisions to see, as it were, in practice the essence of the strategies used by the US during the Cold War, including, for example, the strategy of containment and the strategy of flexible response. The most common comment is: 'Now we understand the domino effect that President Eisenhower talked about'. This is a dream summary for an academic.

The *Twilight Struggle* game has also lived to see its app which is an interactive version of the game that allows gameplay of different difficulty levels.³³ The app is a faithful reproduction of the board version with the rules and mechanics preserved. It is enriched with a soundtrack made up of original recordings of leaders' speeches from the Cold War period. In an environment saturated with visual as well as audio

details, the possibilities of assimilating knowledge increase significantly. The sheer amount of information conveyed by the games far exceeds that of history textbooks; thanks to the emotion evoked it becomes easier to remember and consolidate.³⁴ It is an interesting idea to use excerpts from the speeches in the board game. A smartphone is usually all that is needed, as the materials are easily available on YouTube or Spotify. Combining image board and text with sound greatly enriches the possibilities of allowing the game to be experienced more deeply.³⁵

The board games discussed in the article are examples of how suitable world history is as a subject for entertainment. The games arouse excitement, facilitating the process of learning and remembering, becoming an inspiration to expand knowledge.³⁶ Players read instructions, cards, read up on issues that interest them, read entire items on the subject or looking for information on various events that helped gain folk lose valuable points. The board game is a form of learning through play in a purer form, and a real treat for history buffs, professional historians, political scientists and those involved in international relations majors.

The popularity of the *Kolejka* and *Twilight Struggle* games should come as no surprise. They were created by experts in both board gaming and in history. This is a recipe for success. Students of history in Poland use the games, among others, in classes on the didactics of history, history in public space, world history and Polish history after 1945. After obtaining a diploma, they become teachers and archivists but also find jobs in public administration units, museums, cultural and scientific institutions. It is also thanks to their competence that games are present not only in schools, but also in public spaces where they effectively disseminate knowledge and historical awareness during organized workshops, gaming evenings and events popularizing history with the board in the background.

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