

Report on the Fourth Warsaw Conference for Young Jewish Studies Researchers Held in Warsaw, 14th-16th June 2011

by Anna M. Rosner

The Mordechai Anielewicz Center for the Study and Teaching of the History and Culture of Jews in Poland was established over twenty years ago. Since then it is an inherent part of the Department of History at Warsaw University, where Jewish Studies specialists can teach students from various departments about the past and present existence of the Jews in the world.

In 2005 students gathered in the Jewish Studies Section of the Scientific Circle of the History Department organized the first Warsaw conference for graduating and PhD students interested in the history and culture of the Jews. Back then the conference was one of the very few scientific events in Poland attracting people specializing in that field. Since then every two years their younger colleagues – next generations of students attending the Mordechai Anielewicz Centre seminars – take on the task of organizing conferences for young, ambitious scholars, wishing to share their knowledge with others. Now, when similar events take place more often, Warsaw conferences aim at being as international and as interdisciplinary as possible. The organizers hope that this will allow the future conferences to stay on the modern map of humanities' events.

Between 14th and 16th June 2011 *The Fourth Warsaw Conference for Young Jewish Studies Researchers* was brought to life as a continuation of Mordechai Anielewicz Center tradition. The event was organized by a group of seven students from three different institutes and one PhD student overlooking the actions of the group. Entire preparations took over six months, and – what distinguishes that conference from the others – the students who agreed to organize it obliged to do it without any help from the university staff. They were fully responsible for the financial site, program setting, contacts with participants and even advisory in the city sightseeing in participants' free time. All the finances needed for the event came from donators: Warsaw University

History Department, The Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, Socio-Cultural Society of the Jews in Poland (TSKŻ), Polish Historical Society, Nissenbaum Family Found, Shalom Foundation and others. The effort paid off, as the interest, reception and comments after the event were all very positive.

The conference took place entirely within the building of the Institute of History. Short opening and welcome speeches were given by Professor Maria Koczerska, the head of the Institute of History, Dr. Jolanta Żyndul, the head of the Mordechai Anielewicz Centre and Zofia Kozłowska, Vice President of the Polish Historical Society.

The event attracted one hundred and fourteen participants, of which nearly one third came from abroad – mainly from Israel, Germany and Ukraine, but also from the United States of America, Canada, Ireland, Great Britain, Italy, Switzerland, Romania, Czech Republic, Lithuania and Russia. There were also many representatives of leading Polish universities such as Warsaw University, Jagiellonian University, Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań, Mikołaj Kopernik University of Toruń, University of Wrocław and Marie Skłodowska-Curie University of Lublin, just to mention few.

The participants gave their speeches in two languages – Polish or English. Each of the thirty-eight panels lasted one and a half hour and consisted in three presentations and a discussion during which all questions asked by the auditors would be answered. All of the participants were expected to introduce their own research, topic of interest or interesting but not-so-well-known issues connected with Jewish Studies. The presentation of vast majority of the papers had shown an outstanding level of scientific engagement and academic experience of young scholars. Discussions and exchange of thoughts as well as the sharing of the research techniques became an important part of the event.

Historical background of the majority of the organizing committee did not affect the selection of the scientific fields represented at the conference. Although most of the papers concentrated on the past events the participants spoke also about the present times, the future awaiting the Jews, today's geopolitical position of Israel and the Middle East conflict. The conference was meant to be as interdisciplinary as possible, therefore different fields such as linguistics, religious studies, sociology, philosophy and even cinematography were represented. The participants spoke a lot about the Holocaust itself, but it turned out that most of the conversations connected with the tragic event

concentrated on the need and the ways of keeping the memory of the horror and both its victims and survivors alive.

Vast range of represented scientific fields allowed the organizers to conduct many panels, which could interest those who specialize in ancient history, modern political studies, Hasidism or even gender studies. *Jewish Experience During 2nd World War* for example, one of the first panels, let participants talk about issues such as education in the ghettos, the role of the Eichmann trial in the construction of historical memory of the Jews or the Soviet deception strategy in regard to the Jewish minority in Poland. Another panel entitled *Diaspora* focused on some rarely discussed topics such as the culture of the Jews in Latin America and Canada. Those who research philosophy would find papers on Spinoza and Sznur Zalman in *Representatives of the Jewish mystics and philosophy* and for those who prefer to focus on earthbound issues *Private Life* panel was held, with topics such as *Family Courts of Israel*, *Mixed Marriages in Judaism* and even *Sex Ethics in Orthodox Judaism*. Historians focused mostly on panels such as *Jews in the Kingdom of Poland*, where sixteenth and seventeenth century affairs were discussed, as well as *Jewish Wars of the Ancient Times*. Surprisingly one of the panels which met high interest among the participants and the guests was *Jews in Film and Photography* where Scandinavian opposition to intolerance in the cinema was brought to everyone attention along with the interpretation of the Shoah photography as one of the ways of dehumanisation of the Jews during the war.

During the conference Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich gave a short lecture *The Centrality of Israel in Jewish Belief*, which most of the participants found very interesting. People taking part in the conference were also given a chance to see Warsaw sights connected with the long Jewish history of the city together with a qualified tour guide. Apart from meetings, conversations and lectures all of the people who took part in the conference had a chance to get to know each other a bit closer and on a less formal basis during an integration dinner on the first day, as well as at lunch on the second day of the conference. This sort of interaction allowed all to make friends, to exchange contact details and sometimes even to come out with plans for new research they could run together.

Thanks to the efforts of the organizers the most important Jewish media in Poland spread the news about the conference within the Jewish community in the country. For the first time in the history of the students' conferences many

visitors from outside of the academic society joined the panels to listen to the papers and take part in the discussions. Despite the fact that the conference took place during the end of the academic year exam session, which engaged most of the students, many of them did find the time to join in as well, which is considered a big success of the conference. Many papers focused on narrow, deeply specialized topics and attracted lecturers and scientists, who frequently visited panels and joined students as auditors.

At present a publication summarizing the conference is being prepared. Two books – one with Polish and one with English papers – should be published by the end of the academic year 2011/2012. Mordechai Anielewicz Center plans to carry out the next international conference for young Jewish studies researchers in late spring 2013. All information about the upcoming event will be published on our site: <http://www.ca.uw.edu.pl/>.

The organizing committee members would like to take the opportunity to thank the Department of History staff, donators and all those who voluntarily helped during the conference.

**THE FOURTH
WARSAW
CONFERENCE
FOR YOUNG
JEWISH STUDIES
RESEARCHERS**

14th-16th June 2011
Institute of History, Warsaw University

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Poster der Vierten Warschauer Konferenz für Nachwuchswissenschaftler der Jüdischen Studien, gestaltet von Anna Rogowska