SUMMARY

The doctoral thesis entitled “Dziennik Obywatelski A-Z (1990-1993) and its place in the system of the regional mass media in the Rzeszów Region” focuses on the newspaper entitled Dziennik Obywatelski A-Z (A-Z Citizens’ Daily) which was published five times a week in Rzeszów, and was distributed within four regions of south-eastern Poland (Tarnobrzeg, Krosno, Przemyśl and Rzeszów Voivodships).

In addition to its genesis and history (4 April 1990 - 30 July 1993), design and layout, as well as thematic range, the study also discusses the role of the paper in the wider context of print media in south-eastern Poland. Given the fact that this was the first post WWII private paper published in Rzeszów, supported by no subsidies, and operating in a competitive market, the author also discusses economic, marketing and organizational factors connected with its functioning and downfall.

The first part the thesis explores the political situation and system related changes in Poland in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Without these changes, the transformation in the world of mass media, which paved way for A-Z daily, would not have been possible. This transformation has also been described in the study, in addition to the history of underground print media in the Communist Poland, and more specifically the history of print media in Rzeszów, both legal and uncensored publications.

No monograph of A-Z was available before, although the paper had played a very important part in the regional market of print media. It was launched at the start of 1990, when the market was still dominated by the state-owned company RSW Prasa, Książka, Ruch. This was the first daily in the region which challenged the monopoly of Nowiny, the newspaper of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) published from 1949. A-Z was established as a result of the historical transformations in Poland, after the round table talks in 1989 which started the laborious process of building a democratic system. A-Z was enabled by these changes and was designed to advocate for them, by representing the ideas of Citizens’ Committees of Solidarity Trade Union; indeed the full name of the paper referred to this fact. Some of its staff members and its founders had been involved in operations of the opposition during 1980-1989. The ground breaking role of A-Z was also linked with the fact that it was the first private daily newspaper in the history of Rzeszów.

As it was shown in the thesis, the main problem of the newly launched paper was linked with the fact it had no initial capital. From the start its publication was financed by revenues from sales of the paper and from ads. Due to this, in economic terms, the enterprise could not be successful because the process of introducing a new title into the market and establishing
its position requires long-time effort and large financial resources. In the case of A-Z, because of its low circulation and the small number of advertisers, publication of the paper generated losses, from the first to the last issue. Attempts to sell the newspaper to a serious investor were also unsuccessful.

During the short time it was published, A-Z also failed in competition with Nowiny daily. According to the most favourable polling results, in 1992 its readership in the region amounted to 25%. During the same time Nowiny achieved a level which was not lower than 50%.¹

Obviously, Nowiny had been present in the market of print media for years, therefore readers were used to it, and for many of them the name of Nowiny was synonymous to a newspaper – after all it was the region’s only newspaper for decades.

Definitely, vicious attacks from the competition, in particular Nowiny, contributed to the poor position of A-Z. Notably, 23% of those regularly reading Nowiny also read A-Z, while nearly 40% of those reading A-Z also bought Nowiny.²

Due to the lower circulation, sales of ads were poorer compared to the competition. In this respect, even during its best period A-Z did not reach 30% of the sales generated by Nowiny.

Another important weakness of A-Z was linked with its very young and inexperienced editorial staff. Practically all the journalists were learning their profession as they were working for this paper. One could say that it was created by amateurs whose errors and mistakes largely affected the newspaper and the way it was perceived. However, in Rzeszów there were no journalists looking for a job, in particular no individuals experienced in working for a newspaper. Additionally, the poor financial condition of the enterprise did not encourage professional journalists to give up their jobs in other papers, to join A-Z.

The fortunes of the paper were also related to the fact that it had no links with any political organization. Following a short period when it supported Citizens’ Committees during local elections as well as Lech Wałęsa during presidential elections, both in 1990, and after the editor-in-chief changed in April 1991, the newspaper exercised and indeed emphasized its independence, as it did not endorse anyone’s political or economic interests. At that point, major political powers in Poland included Solidarity and parties which emerged from it.

One year after A-Z was launched, a representative of the Trade Union, and persons linked with him, acquired Nowiny, a profit-generating newspaper with large circulation and established position; notably they did not need to contribute their own funds. Despite all these advantages, the independent newspaper was seen as competition, in terms of business and ideas. As a result it became a target for incessant attacks.

Colportage is another interesting issue, which still has not been investigated, and which is related not only to A-Z but also to numerous independent papers newly established in Poland in 1989-1993. The only entity operating in this area was Ruch, an enterprise owned by RSW company.

Hence, in 1989 -1990, newly launched papers were distributed by a company which also published older periodicals, and the former constituted the first ever competition for the latter. After RSW company liquidation process was initiated, newly appointed directors in charge of Ruch, both in the central headquarters and in branch offices were selected by the Liquidation Commission, obviously taking into account local conditions as well as political and personal affiliations. Hence, Ruch continued to distribute both new titles and papers which had been in the market for years. Furthermore, in some regions these old titles were awarded to Solidarity and to politicians who decided about appointment of management in distribution departments; this in fact also happened in Rzeszów.

² J. Filas, op. cit., p. 7.
Undoubtedly it is also important that, just like previously, the new political system in Poland was to be based on political parties, and the term “civic society” remained an elegant rhetorical figure. The parties showed no interest in supporting independent publications and in creating a market of free news media. The old organizations, which existed in the previous system, had their own media, and the new ones made, frequently successful, attempt to take over well-established titles; this did not involve any effort or financial and organizational risk. Consequently, no system was created to provide support for new independent publications.

Likewise, foreign investors, interested in print media related business, were more likely to purchase well-known titles, existing for years, than to take risk an invest in newly established newspapers. Even more so, because newspapers could be purchased from people or institutions which acquired these, practically free of charge, from RSW Liquidation Commission, therefore their price in Poland was relatively low. Ultimately, this approach turned out to be justified; out of all the 36 regional newspapers published in Polish People’s Republic (“PRL”), 31 survived the transformation and in longer timeframes succeeded in the market.

A-Z daily was launched by a group of enthusiasts who had been involved in publication of student magazines in the 1970s, and underground periodicals in the 1980s. These enthusiasts believed that political feasibility would suffice to ensure success of a newly launched newspaper. Yet, just like today, robust financial backing was necessary to succeed, yet it was unavailable to those who initiated the project.

Importantly, A-Z shared its history with other similar initiatives. During the time of its operation (1989-1993) as many as 35 regional and local papers were launched in Poland. Thirty of these were in the market for less than four years, just like A-Z which appeared for three years and four months.

The thesis consists of an introduction, eight chapters and conclusion. The first chapter discusses the political situation and the transformations in Poland in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The events of 1989 included round table talks and partly free parliamentary elections. This way changes in the Polish political system were initiated, and involved conversion from one-party dictatorship to democracy, and in economy from command and distribution model to free market. Polish People’s Republic (“PRL”) was transformed into the Third Republic of Poland.

Without the political changes, discussed in the first chapter, no transformation in mass media would have taken place, paving way for such initiatives as Dziennik Obywatelski A-Z. This transformation is scrutinized in Chapter II, consisting of five sections. The first one presents underground periodicals published in PRL during 1976-1990. Indeed, before the market of free mass media was established, there had been numerous independent periodicals and publications in Poland. Samizdat publications were the most important, or at times even the only manifestation of dissident activity in PRL, and their role cannot be overestimated. Inventory of such papers from 1976-1990 comprises over 5,000 titles and the list is still being supplemented. It is possible to distinguish four stages in the functioning of such publications. The first one from 1976 to 1980 in a way was a pioneering period; the second stage from 31 August 1980 to 13 December 1981 was associated with the founding of Solidarity, and its legal operation; the third one (1981-1986), after martial law was imposed, during this period people involved in such activity faced most severe repressions; the fourth stage from 1987 to 1990 was a time of less repressive laws – independent publishing houses started commercial

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3 M. Marcinkiewicz and S. Ligarski (ed), Papierem w system. Prasa drugoobiegowa w PRL, Szczecin 2010, p. 11.
operation, “uncertified” periodicals appeared in large numbers, and finally the phenomenon of samizdat ceased to exist altogether, after preventive censorship was abolished.

The second section of Chapter II examines legal regulations related to mass media operation, in force during 1980-1991. The most important legal regulation in this area was the censorship act \(^5\), which in Poland was lifted only in April 1990.\(^6\) Another act of major significance, Press Law was adopted in 1984\(^7\), amended a few times, and today is still in force. Changes introduced by these as well as other acts passed by the Parliament of PRL following the round table talks, paved way for new periodicals, which were independent from the old regime.

The third section of Chapter II discusses the 1989-1991 transformations in daily press, in particular regional newspapers from the times of PRL. The authorities in power at the time liquidated the monopolistic RSW company and awarded rights to the existing titles to other, smaller publishers. Apart from Dziennik Ludowy, a paper published by the Polish People’s Party, all the national daily papers appearing in PRL survived this first phase of the transformation. They were privatized and in 1991-1993 they maintained their position in the market, undoubtedly with the support of their old-time readers. Papers previously published by RSW included Expres Wieczorny\(^8\), Sztandar Młodych\(^9\), Życie Warszawy and the only newspapers in the market, focusing on sport: Przegląd Sportowy, Tempo and Sport. Trybuna Ludu - the newspaper of the Polish United Workers’ Party transformed into Trybuna\(^10\) - a medium of Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SDRP)\(^11\). Only two out of all the newspapers published by RSW disappeared from the market shortly after they were privatized, even though in PRL they were very popular. These were: Gromada Rolnik Polski and Świat Młodych. Other newspapers, which in the times of PRL were not published by RSW, were still in the market. These included two titles owned by two groups co-creating the former political system: Słowo-Dziennik Katolicki\(^12\) and Kurjer Polski\(^13\). Żołnierz Wołości,

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\(^6\) Act of 11 April 1990 revoking act on publications and entertainment control, on rescinding the controlling bodies and on amendment of Press Law (Journal of Law from 1990, No. 29, item 173).


\(^8\) Faced with RSW liquidation process, majority of journalists working for Express Wieczorny established a cooperative, and intended to seek acquisition of the rights to the title. Before the Liquidation Commission’s decision on awarding these rights was announced, Express Wieczorny was published by the cooperative from March 1990 to January 1991. In October 1990 the cooperative also launched another daily, a morning paper entitled Express. On 11 January 1991, RSW Liquidation Commission awarded Express Wieczorny to Solidarity Press Foundation associated with Porożumienie Centrum (Centre Agreement) party. In this situation 80% of those working for Express Wieczorny (including the entire management) left for the newly launched Express. In February 1991 the journalists’ cooperative established, jointly with ZPR, a company named ZPR-Express, which published Express from March. In October 1991 ZPR bought the shares of the journalists’ cooperative, and the name of the paper was changed, in November 1991, into Super Express. Solidarity Press Foundation sold Express Wieczorny to a Swiss company Marquard in July 1993. (As cited in:) D. Grzelewksa, Transformacja pism popołudniowych (1982-1992), (in:) ed. A. Słomkowska, Transformacja Prasy Polskiej. Materiały Pomocnicze do Najnowszej Historii Dziennikarstwa), vol. 22, Warszawa 1992, p. 84-85.

\(^9\) The former newspaper of the Polish Socialist Youth Union in 1990 was sold by RSW Liquidation Commission to SM-Media S.A.

\(^10\) The former name was „Trybuna Ludu, organ KC PZPR”. From 1990 Trybuna was published by Ad Novum sp.

\(^11\) The former name was „Trybuna Ludu, organ KC PZPR”. From 1990 Trybuna was published by Ad Novum sp.

\(^12\) Published by PAX Association; until 1993 it was named Słowo Powszechne.

\(^13\) Paper published in PRL by the Alliance of Democrats.
published by the national government, remained in the market. The privatized papers included Rzeczpospolita originally also designed as a governmental medium.

Similarly, regional newspapers mostly handled the transformation successfully. Only five titles disappeared while those which continued in the market included 31 regional and local papers from the times of PRL, 30 of those had been published by RSW. For many years they were the most important papers in their respective regions, and soon, after most of the “newcomers” disappeared, they only faced competition of local editions of Gazeta Wyborcza and, in some cities, other dailies previously published by RSW. These papers owed their success to their long-time readers, accustomed to the “old titles” and their experienced and highly professional editorial teams.

The subsequent section of Chapter II looks at new papers, started during this period of transformation. In 1989-1991 approx. 3,000 new periodicals were launched in Poland and then each year about 600 more appeared. In 1993 the list amounted to 2,386 titles (and 258 more were recorded as suspended). These included a few dozen of newly established daily papers.

The first one was Gazeta Wyborcza. This daily was established following the round table agreement, and was intended to provide a platform for the movement of Citizens’ Committees. Gazeta Wyborcza achieved great success in the market and in terms of readership in the very first year. Unfortunately, its dominant role, as well as the strong position of newspapers founded in PRL adversely affected endeavours aimed at establishing new daily papers. Potential investors and entities interested in owning their own periodicals preferred to take part in privatization of RSW titles and were less likely to take risk and launch new ones. As a result in 1993, out of all the 17 national daily papers only four were new titles, which had not existed in PRL. These were Gazeta Wyborcza, Nowa Europa, Gazeta Rolnicza and Super Express.

Gazeta Wyborcza started to publish regional supplements. They appeared rapidly - in 1992 there were eleven, and by the end of 1993 there were eighteen different editions.

14 Until 1991 the paper was called Zolnierz Wolnosci. It is published by the Ministry of National Defense.
15 From the beginning of 1990, the publisher of the paper, i.e. Presspublica was jointly owned by the State Treasury (51% of the shares) and French publishing company Hersant (49% of the shares).
16 The only title which had not been published by RSW was Ilustrowany Kurier Polski.
18 Sylwester Dziki (ed.), Katalog Prasy Polskiej 1993, Kraków 1993, item 39
19 Ibid.
20 The second periodical, first published on 2.06.1989, following the round table talks, was the weekly paper of the Independent Self-Governing Labour Union "Solidarity", entitled Tygodnik Solidarnosc (editor-in-chief: Tadeusz Mazowiecki), which had been published earlier in 1981, being the first legal news medium of the opposition in PRL (it was closed when martial law was imposed). The third paper, resulting from the roundtable talks, was first published on 3 September 1989; this was the periodical of Independent Self-governing Trade Union of Individual Farmers "Solidarity", entitled Tygodnik Rolnikow Solidarnosc (editor-in-chief: Stanislaw Siwek).
21 Importantly, the history of this newspaper is by no means representative for all the changes and processes discussed here. This is linked with the privileged position at the start, and the resulting success in the market as well as the fact that the same editorial management has been retained; from the beginning the entire situation was unique compared to other periodicals established in that period.
22 After two years, at the end of 1991, circulation of Gazeta Wyborcza weekend edition amounted to approx. 750,000 copies. (As cited in:) Z. Bajka, Polska... op. cit., p. 33.
23 S. Dziki (ed.), op. cit.
24 This list does not include a number of titles, defined in the Polish Press Catalogue as "specialist daily papers", i.e. Boss- Expressowa Informacja Ekonomiczna (published by PAP Polish Press Agency from March 1989), Boss Gieldy (PAP, from 01.1989), Rynki Zagraniczne (National Chamber of Commerce, from 04.1957) and Ogolnopolski Goniec Reklamowy (Pronanex sp. z o.o., from 1992).
25 Z. Bajka, Polska... op. cit., p.38.
Obviously other publishers were not hindered by this fact and a number of new local and regional newspapers were launched during 1989-1993. In most cities new daily papers existed side by side with the “old” newspapers, published for years (mainly by RSW). For a vast majority of the newcomers, the competition of both the “veterans” and the local supplements of Gazeta Wyborcza, was extremely challenging. Presumably because of this the number of newly launched papers rapidly decreased after 1993. In the period from mid-1989 until the start of 1993 thirty five regional and local daily papers appeared. Most of these continued in the market for less than four years – 24 of them had folded by mid-1994, and only five of them achieved a more long-lasting success.

The final part of Chapter II presents developments in Catholic print media in the relevant period. This was a significant component of the Polish media market in the late 1980s/early 1990s. In 1988 there were 35 popular Catholic periodicals, with a joint circulation of 1.2 million copies, in addition to numerous magazines with smaller circulation and range (diocese, monastic order, specializing in theology). Two years later, in 1990 there were 46 popular periodicals, including 7 weeklies (e.g. Gość Niedzielny, Ład, Przegląd Katolicki), 4 bi-weekly magazines (e.g. Gwiazda Morza, Ład Boży), 19 monthlies (e.g. Mały Gość Niedzielny, Poslaniec Serca Jezusowego), as well as 7 bi-monthly and 2 quarterly magazines. In the early 1990s there was a decrease in the readership of popular Catholic periodicals, accompanied with a large scale increase in the number of parish newsletters. These accounted for approximately 1/4 of all Polish local and sub-local periodicals, whose total number is estimated at a level of approx. 2,000 each year. According to official data, the total circulation of Catholic periodicals (excluding specialist and academic journals) in 1993...
amounted to 1.2 million copies. The top position in sales was achieved by Niedziela weekly whose circulation ranged from 50,000 to 150,000 copies as well as Ryczew Niepokalanej monthly (70,000-300,000).35

The third chapter of the thesis, entitled "The Origin of Dziennik Obywatelski A-Z" presents historical background related to print media in Rzeszów, as well as Solidarity and independent news media (1980-1989) and activities leading to publication of the first issues of A-Z. The chapter shows that the new daily paper, in terms of ideology making reference to opposition publications appearing in Rzeszów in the 1980s, had to draw on experience gained by professional newspapers, even though majority of its authors and contributors had never been involved in journalism, or had changed their career years earlier. The chapter also presents the objectives of the newspaper. Designed as an independent and privately owned medium, it was also envisaged as a way to support candidates of Citizens’ Committees in the upcoming local elections, and to present arguments based on the broadly defined idea of Solidarity and identity based on this movement.

Chapter IV, entitled “Graphic design of A-Z and its means of expression”, discusses journalism genres used in the newspaper, as well as changes in its layout. It is shown that the graphic design evolved during the first months of its publication. The paper largely focused on news and information (64.4% of all means of expression). Other genres occupied significantly less space. The most important means included e.g. photographs (11.3%), opinion journalism (3.4%), interviews (2.2%), reports (2%), accounts (1.4%), columns (1.9%) and polls (1.3%). The chapter also looks at the TV guide supplement, which appeared from August 1990 until the final issue of A-Z, and was also published as a weekly paper entitled Telewizja od A do Z. Also discussed here, the only two special issues of A-Z were published to add attractiveness to the regularly appearing newspaper rather than to cover specific themes, events or problems.

Chapter V, “Subject matter of the newspaper”, focuses on the range of topics covered by A-Z. Out of the 21 thematic groups which have been identified, most space was occupied by issues linked with politics (21.1 %), which does not mean that the newspaper was dominated by that, as e.g. sports news occupied nearly as much space (18.9 %). Other themes covered by A-Z included: social issues (8.8 %), economy (8.4 %), culture (6.7 %), police operations and crime (6.4 %), life-styles and customs (3.6 %), agriculture (2.8 %) history (1.9 %). A-Z was a regional daily paper, therefore majority of the topics covered by it were related to Rzeszów and the region (42 %). Based on selected texts covering the elections in Poland, this chapter also presents an evolution of the newspaper related to political matters. Only during the first months of its existence, i.e. at the time of the local elections, the paper followed its original objective and provided support to Citizens’ Committees of Solidarity. At the later stage, after political parties emerged from the Committees, the paper supported Lech Wałęsa in the presidential elections. One year after it was started, and following a change of its editor-in-chief, A-Z adopted an approach based on pluralism, and avoided one-sided political involvement.

Chapter VI is entitled “Journalists and organization of editorial staff”. It shows that majority of A-Z staff had no earlier experience of working in a daily paper. Many of them learned the craft of journalism after they got employed at A-Z. The structure of the editorial board developed over time to match the current needs of the paper.

Chapter VII, "A-Z versus other print media in the region", examines the fortunes of the competing titles, i.e. newly launched papers, and those formerly published by RSW and in the 1990s undergoing ownership and ideological transformations. All of the weeklies newly launched in Rzeszów folded sooner or later. Those which survived included local weekly

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magazines which had existed earlier and those published in the voivodships adjoining the Rzeszów region. In that period four new daily papers (including A-Z) were launched in Rzeszów, and the regional supplement to Gazeta Wyborcza was the only one which survived the test of time. Following ownership change, Nowiny daily, despite the competition, was able to maintain the monopoly, being the most important print medium in the region. A-Z daily conducted discussions with majority of the newspapers in Rzeszów, the most serious and relentless with Nowiny. Frequently right in its arguments, ultimately, however, it was A-Z which lost as it had to withdraw from the market of print media.

The final Chapter VIII, “Organization and publication”, presents the publishers of the paper, its financial situation, distribution method, readership rates, acquisition of adverts, promotional campaigns, as well as newspaper administration. The analysis shows that, despite the ground breaking organizational and marketing concepts, circulation and sale of adverts were insufficient to ensure stability of the paper.

The thesis is closed with Bibliography, divided into five parts:
I. Archival sources - 15 items;
II. Printed documents - 40 items
III. Unpublished sources - 4 items
IV. Monographs, non-serial publications, articles - 75 items
V. Bibliographies, reference books, catalogues - 9 items

Literature linked with this subject matter is very scarce, and the history of the newspaper was only briefly outlined in studies focusing on media transformation in south-eastern Poland, published in the early 1990s.

The main sources used by the author include annual sets of A-Z daily and other periodicals published in Rzeszów at the same time. He also used his own archive comprising numerous documents linked with A-Z history. Since the author was personally involved in most events linked with the newspaper, and no related documents exist, part of the thesis is based on personal memories. Some source information was obtained from accounts contributed by persons directly involved in events of importance for the subject matter covered herein.

In course of writing the thesis the author applied mainly the historical, i.e. descriptive and analytical, method in chronological order, as well as the analytic (quantitative and qualitative) method used by media studies, quantitative and statistical method and comparative method.