

Participation of the Society for the Support of the Construction of State Schools in the Realisation of Construction Projects in the North-eastern Borderlands of the Second Republic of Poland

Stefania Walasek / e-mail: sjarmulska@wp.pl
Institut of Pedagogy University of Wroclaw, Poland

Walasek, S. (2016). Participation of the Society for the Support of the Construction of State Schools in the Realisation of Construction Projects in the North-eastern Borderlands of the Second Republic of Poland. *Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal*, 8/1, 11–21.

In the Second Republic of Poland the actions undertaken in state schooling called for intensive efforts in the realisation of the school duty and the organisation of new schools. The difficulties related with the setting up of the network of schools which would allow children to fulfil their school duty would arise in, among others, the north-eastern borderlands of the reborn Republic. The aforementioned tasks required major financial contributions connected with the construction of schools. These needs were too high for the State Treasury. Likewise, the local government, especially in villages, did not have sufficient funds. In 1933 the Society for the Support of the Construction of State Schools was founded. It was a charity organisation that would undertake a number of different actions to use even small funds to provide significant financial support in construction of schools.

Key words: *state school; construction of schools; Charity*

In the Second Republic of Poland there was a number of issues connected with state schooling that required intensive efforts of both the ministry of education and the local government. The problems arose mostly in the Eastern Borderlands, in the territory of the partition of Poland that had formerly been under Russian occupation. The historical conditions that resulted in, among others, the lack of Polish schools (until 1915) presented the local school administration with tasks encompassing the organisation of state schools, inclusion of children in the educational process, because of their school duty, and providing the founded schools with qualified teaching staff. The aforementioned scope of activities was a part of a broad effort for the benefit of Polish schools for children aged

7 to 14, especially because the schools constituted the centres of cultural life of local communities.

The example of the Vilnius province show that the realisation of these tasks was not easy. When addressing the question of the organisation of state schools one is presented first and foremost with the problem of school buildings that need to meet certain construction and health and safety standards. The documents stored in the Lithuanian Central State Archive in Vilnius show a difficult situation of the particular towns and villages, whose schools would be located in rented rooms, private flats, farmers' houses, or in parishes. Frequently spontaneous actions of the leaders of local communities and organisers of schools were being held back by circumstances such as the lack of space for all the students, lack of floors, heating, and school desks. This rendered the proper realisation of didactic and educational tasks impossible.

In the archives one can discover in which towns and villages the construction of schools was undertaken during the German occupation (1915–1918). In the village of Pamucie (Lyntypska borough, Świeciański district) the local population brought some wood from the forest and started building a barrack for a state school.¹ Very soon the local military administration tried to claim the barrack. Because of the unresolved problem of ownership the construction works came to a halt.

Throughout 1918 to 1922 in the Vilnius province intensive efforts were made to construct new schools. The initiatives were spontaneous and it appeared that all the ideas were about to be implemented at once. The Bill of February 17, 1922² guaranteed that the works of the local governments could be carried out successfully. The bill, however, was vague and written rather carelessly. The bill did not address the crucial problem of the sources of financing the construction works. On the basis of the bill in question the ministry of education issued a regulation of April 6, 1922³ in which it was noted that 50% of the costs of the construction of state schools was to be covered by the borough, and the remaining 50% from the so-called support from the State Treasury.

In the regulations pertaining to the granting of the support funds for construction of schools one ought to look for the root of the difficulties in

¹ Inspektorat Szkolny pow. Świeciańskiego do Dowództwa Zdobyczy Wojennej w Wilnie, Świeciany May 30, 1922, Lithuanian Central State Archive in Vilnius (LCVA), f. 172, op. 1, no. 722, p. 94.

² Ustawa z dnia 17 lutego 1922 r. o budowie publicznych szkół powszechnych. *Dziennik Ustaw (DzUMWRiOP)* 1922, Issue 18, pos. 144.

³ *DzUMWRiOP* 1922, Issue 12, pos. 113.

solving the problem. The local governments did not have budgets substantial enough and the local population was not always willing to pay voluntary taxes to build schools.

However, the financial difficulties did not discourage the local government authorities and in the years 1922–1925 further investments were started. At the same time the Treasury stopped supporting the construction of schools.

The situation was difficult because a number of construction projects was never finalised. What is more, at the turn of the 1920s and the 1930s the world economic crisis influenced Poland and exacerbated the problem.

In the numerous mentions attention is drawn to the halting of construction works. For example, the Province Office of Nowogródzkie in 1926 informs that in the Stołpeck district in the years 1928–1929 the building of three public state schools was initiated (in Wielka Słoboda, Turec, and Kościuki) “but because of the ceasing of the financing from the State Treasury it was stopped and over the last seven years the boroughs have not been able to raise enough funds to complete them”.⁴

The lack of financial funds would often bring very advanced construction works to a halt. It defeated initiatives when there was a growing social awareness of the need to have a school and to educate the young generation.

On the basis of the population census of December 9, 1931 it was noted that to meet the urgent needs it would have been necessary to build 2,500–3,000 rooms for schooling annually for the following 20 years. Constructing those would not yet suffice in solving the problem of securing enough space for all children to study. Furniture and equipment were also required. In the pedagogical press, e.g. in “Przyjaciel Szkoły”, it was emphasised that “reality and the interests of the State call for a great effort that cannot be made only by the State and the local government”.⁵ That is why the participation of the entire society is necessary so that “the charity funding for schools may become the interest of a group of people who can understand the importance of the participation of the society in construction of schools, which is crucial for the state”.⁶

⁴ Urząd Wojewódzki Nowogródzki, Wydział Samorządowy do Towarzystwa Popierania Budowy Publicznych Szkół Powszechnych w Wilnie, Nowogródek July 14, 1936, LCVA, f. 278, op. 1, no. 36, p. 117.

⁵ K., Odezwa Towarzystwa Popierania Budowy Publicznych Szkół Powszechnych, *Przyjaciel Szkoły* 1933, Issue 13, p. 431.

⁶ Op. cit., p. 432.

In 1933 the starost of Lidzk proposed that, among others, that “a Poviato School Construction Committee be founded in the poviato – this consist of the representatives of all the boroughs”.⁷

In the same year the idea to set up the Society for the Support of the Construction of State Schools (Towarzystwo Popierania Budowy Publicznych Szkół Powszechnych, hereinafter TPBPSP). The organisation’s aim was to support the construction and equipment of state schools.⁸

The society was founded in June 1933 in cooperation with school authorities. Władysław Raczkiewicz (Senate Chairman) was elected its chairperson. The Board consisted of six people: Julian Smulikowski, MP (vice-president of Polish Teachers’ Association –Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego, hereinafter ZNP), senator Siciński (president of the Christian-National Association of State School Teachers, Stanisław Machowski (secretary of the board of ZNP), dr Michał Mendys (director of Department of General Schooling), Stanisław Bugajski (Head of the State Schools Department).⁹

In the statute of the society it is stated that “the Society is divided into districts, precincts, and associations”.¹⁰ The basic organisational unit was therefore the Association. They were financed from: “a) entry fees and subscriptions; b) donations and subventions; c) revenue from real estate and interest on capital and loans; d) revenue from publications; e) revenue from other sources, such as: concerts, lectures, shows, events, etc.; f) other sources”.¹¹ The District Committee was obliged to transfer 25% of the funds raised by the Associations to the Board. The remaining funds were spent by the Districts according to the regulations issued by the Board. Paragraph 17 of the statute defined the authorities of the society as the Public Meeting of the Associations and the Committees, General Meeting of the Society as well as the boards of the Associations and the Committees and the Society Board. The Minister of Religions and Public Enlightenment and his subordinate school authorities of the first and the second level could nominate “delegates-advisors to the Public Meeting of the Associations and the Committees, General Meeting of the

⁷ Walasek, S. (2006). *Szkolnictwo powszechne na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej (1915–1939)*, Kraków, p. 234.

⁸ The society was founded in June 1933 and it was chaired by the then Marshall of the Senate W. Raczkiewicz, *Ibid.*

⁹ *Akcja budowy szkół powszechnych, Oświata i Wychowanie*, 1933, Issue 6–7, p. 549.

¹⁰ *Statut Towarzystwa Popierania Budowy Publicznych Szkół Powszechnych*. Lwów 1933, p. 1.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 3–4

¹² *Statut Towarzystwa Popierania Budowy...*, p. 21.

Society as well as the boards of the Associations and the Committees and the Society Board and their Executive Departments and Auditorial Commissions and the Main Auditorial Commission".¹²

While the statute discusses the sources of financing, it lacks regulations of the distribution of the funds. It can be assumed that they were granted to the particular boroughs on the basis of applications submitted by the Associations to District Committee for the "fulfilment of the needs of the schools".¹³

The report of TPBPSP for the period between July 1, 1933 and December 31, 1934 states that there was 2,788,359 zł committed to construction of schools and purchasing school equipment, and the subventions of the Board amounted to 1,015,000 zł.¹⁴ What is more, the society contributed to the construction 288 quarters for state school teachers. Among the mentioned figures one can notice that in 1934 the Wilno district received 255,000 zł in funding, which, however, did not amount to a significant number when compared to the needs of the schools in this region of Poland.¹⁵

The aforementioned project of the municipality of Lidzk to organise district structures to finance construction of schools was approved. The district of Grodno informed the TPBPSP and the Wilno school authorities "that in the district a District Fund for the Construction of Schools was founded, and annually it grants donations amounting to a sum of over a dozen of thousands of zlotys".¹⁶ The District Fund did not have funds sufficient to secure the needs of the powiat, that is why loans and charities of the TPBPSP were also required. It can be assumed that the cooperation of the organisations was seamless. However, further parts of the document indicate that the District Department, when planning the building of schools, would count on the support of the society, which the Society would frequently fail to provide at the last moment, which led to significant material losses and discouraged the local communities.

¹³ *Statut Towarzystwa Popierania Budowy...*, p. 6.

¹⁴ The loans for building schools amounted o 2,391,000 zł, and nonreturnable subventions to 280,399 zł; loans for school equipment – 2,000 zł, and nonreturnable subventions for school equipment and didactic tools – 114,560 zł; Towarzystwo Popierania Budowy Publicznych Szkół Powszechnych, *Oświata i Wychowanie* 1935, Issue 5, p. 326.

¹⁵ B., O izbę szkolną. *Oświata i Wychowanie* 1935, Issue 7, p. 504.

¹⁶ Wydział Powiatowy w Grodnie do Towarzystwa Popierania Budowy Publicznych Szkół Powszechnych przy Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego Wileńskiego w Wilnie, Grodno September 11, 1936 r., LCVA f. 278, , Issue 36, p.134.

One also ought to note the good cooperation between the local government and the Board of the District Committee of TPBPSP in Vilnius.

The 1934 correspondence between the Vilnius governor, the Education Authority of the Vilnius School District, the Society for the Support of the Construction of State Schools, and the District Department in Głębokie presents the common effort for the construction of a state school in Głębokie. The local community also contributed to the work.

It can be found in the documents that out of the 8,500 inhabitants, not including the nearby villages, there is one school with the capacity of 750 students.¹⁷ The school was a group of small houses “below any hygienic standards, which is also a source of infectious diseases”.¹⁸ As it was observed, 1,500 children ought to attend school in the town. Consequently, 50% of the children were out of school, “and the gathered inhabitants cannot educate their children in any other way, henceforth the children, against the will of their parents, shall remain illiterate”.¹⁹ The inhabitants of Głębokie presented the proposal to build two state schools in the town, which would have a sufficient number of classrooms, and where the conditions for learning would be proper and standards of hygiene met. The request was concluded with a dramatic address: “the people gathered believe that governor will not allow that in the 20th century the citizens of the State of Poland, regardless of their faith and willing to fulfil their duties to the State, should be forced to watch their children grow up without even the most basic education required of a citizen”.²⁰

The postulate to build the schools was not entirely up to date, because the Town Council of Głębokie had started the construction of a school, however, it could only be completed with the help of funds that the town did not have.

The estimate of the construction costs was originally 77,765 zł. Because of the objections of the Province Office it was raised to 82,513 zł.²¹ The construction cost forced the city to apply to the Society for the Support of the Construction of State Schools for a 20,000 zł loan, and another loan of the same figure to the Labour Fund. In reply to the

¹⁷ Do Jaśnie Wielmożnego Pana Wojewody w Wilnie, Głębokie 7. 09. 1934, Wileński Urząd Wojewódzki. Wydział Samorządu. Oświata i Kultura 1934 r., LCVA, f. 51, op. 5, Issue 1133, no page number.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Pismo Od Wojewody Wileńskiego do Pana Kuratora OS Wileńskiego z 22. 09. 1934 r. Sprawa – budowa szkoły powszechnej w Głębokiem, Wileńskim Urząd Wojewódzki... 1934 r., no. page number.

application the society granted the city a 15,000 zł loan, and Labour Fund failed to reply at all.

In a letter from June 1934 the District Board of the society in Vilnius informed the voivod of the zero-interest loans for the construction of schools,²² including the dziśnieński district (zaleska, pliska, mikołajewska boroughs, and the town of Głębokie), that amounted to 22,000 zł. In the same document the Society informs the province of the figure of the loans and charities of further boroughs in the Vilnius School District. Altogether the Society granted 73,000 zł in loans and 7,000 zł in charity funds for the construction of state schools in 22 boroughs and 2 towns (Mołodeczno and Głębokie).²³

The greatest problem for the borrowers was the requirement for the funds to be spent before July 15. After this date the District Board was obliged to transfer all funds not spent to the Board in Warsaw. This is difficult to understand in light of the regulation of the Statute of the Society stating that funds ought to be allocated for the entire year.

In the annual report of the TPBPSP for 1935²⁴ the Board mentions a number of issues. It was noted that difficulties were caused by too high a subscription fee. The decision was made to decrease it and to attempt to find new members. What is more, it was stated that there was not enough contact between the District Committees and the Associations, and that "most of the District Committees fail to complete their tasks within the time limit set by the Board".²⁵ Further in the report it is emphasised that the District Committees did not meet the deadline to submit annual reports, and that 11 of the Committees submitted incomplete reports, which was caused by the Associations failing to fulfil their duties.

In the document from August 1935 the Vilnius Province Office notes that "year by year the number of school children increases disproportionately to the number of the newly constructed and rented school buildings and classrooms".²⁶ That is why a substantial number

²² Zarząd Okręgowy Towarzystwa Popierania Budowy Publicznych Szkół Powszechnych do Pana Wojewody Wileńskiego w Wilnie, Wilno 19. 06. 1934, LCVA, f. 51, op. 5, Issue 1051, no page number.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Sprawozdanie z działalności Komitetu Okręgowego Towarzystwa Popierania Budowy Publicznych Szkół Powszechnych w Wilnie w roku 1935, LCVA, f. 278, op. 1., Issue 36, pp. 177–179.

²⁵ Op. cit., p. 177.

²⁶ Urząd Nowogródzki Wydział Samorządowy do Towarzystwa Popierania Budowy Publicznych Szkół Powszechnych w Wilnie, 17 sierpnia 1935, f. 278, op. 1, Issue 36, p. 318.

of children were out of school. As the Office communicates, due to the difficult financial situation of the local governments in many towns and villages construction works came to a halt. In a letter to TPBPSP a request is made for support in the form of loans and charity funds that the Office planned to devote to completing the construction of schools.

In the Public Meeting of the District Committee of TPBPSP in Vilnius that took place on March 22, 1936 the annual working schedule was accepted. It was decided that the number of members actually paying their subscriptions would be increased, and that schools of the second and third level would be supported if they did not have sufficient buildings. 250,000 zł²⁷ was allocated to this aim, and the decision was made to devote 10,000 zł to didactic aids.

The interest of the local governments in the work of the Society was great. The opportunity to finance the construction of schools in villages and towns was noticed. Nevertheless, the procedures of receiving the financial support were somewhat misinterpreted, because in 1936 the District Department of the TPBPSP in Vilnius in a letter to the Board of the District Department in Grodno explained that loans and charity funds are to be granted to "those units of local government that construct schools"²⁸ and the allocated sums are transferred to Borough Boards. It was clarified that "the amount of the planned loans and charity funds and the clearly defined aims that they are to be spent towards are determined according to the regulations of the District Committees of the Society in cooperation with school authorities and upon the official acceptance of the construction plan".²⁹ Every year in January the Board of the Society in Warsaw would accept the budget, subsequently the District Committees would draw up construction plans on the basis of the applications submitted by the Precinct Committees.

It needs to be noted that the efforts made to build schools had numerous supporters. They were, among others, the Polish Society of Book Publishers and the Polish Booksellers' Society, who in 1933 donated 10 gr from every school book sold to TPBPSP.³⁰ Schools also received substantial support from the State School Books Publishing House who "every year distributes a number of books among schools and

²⁷ Op. cit., p. 178.

²⁸ TPBPSP Komitet Okręgowy Wilno do Zarządu Wydziału Powiatowego w Grodnie, October 2, 1936, op. cit., p. 135.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Budujemy szkoły. *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1933, Issue 36, p. 586.

occasionally among the poorest of school children”.³¹ Similar donations of school books were submitted by private enterprises such as the Polish Booksellers Association (Związek Księgarzy Polskich). Their action consisted in marking every school book with the label “Donate a dime to the Society for the Support of the Construction of State Schools”.³²

The Society for the Construction of Schools collected funds from many sources, such as a voluntary tax on teachers' salaries, subscriptions, and charity donations. Originally the Society would collect donations by selling post stamps. The effort of the youth who were engaged in selling mostly the stamps of the lowest price range (5-10 groszes) needs to be mentioned. These actions were aimed to promote the Society and to attract new members as well as supporters of the cause of building state schools. In pedagogical press there was a call for action to support the Society, because “the sum collected from the society and given back to the society amounted to about 200,000 zł and it made it possible to help 139 boroughs who could not complete the construction of schools. They were granted interest-free loans of a few thousand złotych as well as long-term loans that were crucial in completing the construction of the schools”.³³

Yet another form of the promotion of the construction of schools was the action called “The Week of the State School” that was organised by TPBPSP starting in 1933 and which was aimed to disseminate the idea of the construction of schools among the society. As it was noted in “Głos Nauczycielski”: “it is high time to get the society interested in the fate of schools, they must be involved in the effort to provide the basic conditions for the founding and the development of schools”.³⁴ As it was noted by Vilnius Municipal Committee that organised the 5th Week of the State School (October 2–9, 1928) year by year “the number of public institutions, social organisations, as well as private individuals with no connections with the schooling system who, due to their understanding of the importance of the task, are glad to make the effort to increase the funding of the construction of schools rises substantially”.³⁵

³¹ Polskie Towarzystwo Wydawców Książek do TPBPSP, Warszawa 2 June 2 1936 r., f. 278, op. 1., Issue 36, p. 161

³² Budujemy szkoły. *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1933, Issue 36, p. 586.

³³ Towarzystwo Popierania Budowy Publicznych Szkół Powszechnych. *Echo Nauczycielskie* 1934, Issue 7, p. 272.

³⁴ Towarzystwo Popierania Budowy Szkół Powszechnych... *Głos Nauczycielski* 1933, Issue 5, p. 80.

³⁵ Wileński Miejski Komitet V Tygodnia Szkoły Powszechnej, 24. IX. 1938, f. 203, op. 1, Issue 7, p. 12.

It was estimated that even in the first year of the work of TPBPSP the Society collected 3 to 4 million zlotys and, as it was noted, "this sum could break the standstill in construction of schools and at least partly fulfil the growing needs necessary to solve the problems connected with it".³⁶ In 1937 the State Treasury devoted 600,000 zł of investment loans as a donation to TPBPSP and a further "680.000 as the rest of the million committed to construction of Marshal Piłsudski schools in the Vilnius region".³⁷

As it was stated, the financial efforts of the Society were generally made to build schools. To a lesser extent the funds were committed to purchasing equipment and didactic tools. Nevertheless, the Society would also work towards this aim. For example, in 1938 school books were purchased and libraries organised in state schools no. 31, 42, 33 in Vilnius.³⁸

The work of the Society was frequently mentioned in pedagogical press. Construction of schools in the particular towns and villages was discussed, and the press would also inform of the difficulties and encourage the society to participate.

For example, in 1933 in "Przyjaciel Szkoły" the Society's call for action was published. Therein it was emphasised that "one of the main tasks that we face is undoubtedly the construction of state schools. It is a growing concern that may bring the development of the school system to a halt".³⁹ When the Society was founded the press informed that "[the Society] aims to rely on the cooperation of all the members of society, to unify individual efforts, to upkeep the society's willingness to donate to schools, to generate interest in the cause".⁴⁰ In the same year in the magazine "Oświata i Wychowanie" information was published about the founding of TPBPSP which "has initiated an energetic effort to set up Associations in all school districts".⁴¹ A year later "Echo Nauczycielskie" informed of the aims of the Society.⁴² Information was published systematically in

³⁶ Towarzystwo Popierania Budowy Szkół Powszechnych. Organizacja, cele, zadania i możliwości. *Głos Nauczycielski* 1933, Issue 5, pp. 79–80.

³⁷ Speech of the Minister of Religions and Public Enlightenment Wojciech Świętosławski at the Budget Commission of the Sejm of February 3, 1938. *Oświata i Wychowanie* 1938, Issue 2, p. 128.

³⁸ Inspektorat Szkolny Wileński Miejski w Wilnie do Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego w Wilnie, 3. XI. 1938, f. 172, op. 4, Issue 415, p. 5.

³⁹ K. Odezwa Towarzystwa Popierania Budowy Publicznych Szkół Powszechnych. *Przyjaciel Szkoły* 1933, Issue 13, p. 431.

⁴⁰ Op. cit. p. 432.

⁴¹ Akcja budowy szkół powszechnych. *Oświata i Wychowanie* 1933, Issue 6–7, p. 549.

⁴² Towarzystwo Popierania Budowy Publicznych Szkół Powszechnych. *Echo Nauczycielskie* 1934 Issue 7, p. 273.

“Oświata i Wychowanie” published by the Ministry of Religions and Public Enlightenment.⁴³

The efforts of the TPBPSP brought substantial results in the form of financial support for construction of schools. It was crucial in such regions as the north-eastern voivodships in which the lack of schools was particularly severe and the economic potential of the local government was insufficient.

What was a major achievement of the Society was that in the years 1933–39 it was able to involve the nation, with the help of the ministry of education, in the priority task of setting up state schooling. Cooperation, combined action, help, and integration of the society brought substantial results in the form of newly built schools, verification of the network of schools, and providing children with places in schools.

⁴³ B., O izbę szkolną *Oświata i Wychowanie* Issue 7, pp. 501–505; Towarzystwo Popierania Budowy Publicznych Szkół Powszechnych, *Oświata i Wychowanie* Issue 5, pp. 325–327.