



The Making of a University

Krzysztof Pawlowski, Ph.D., founder and longtime president of Wyższa Szkoła Biznesu/National-Louis University in Nowy Sącz, southern Poland, talks to Tadeusz Belerski.

■ How did you come up with the idea to set up a college in a small city like Nowy Sącz?

In 1989 I was elected to the parliament from the Nowy Sącz region and became a senator. At the time, I was among a group of parliamentarians who visited Germany at the invitation of the Adenauer Foundation to gain an insight into a country with a stable market economy. Among other things, they showed us a small private business school in Vallendar, a town near Koblenz. It made me wonder because the German university education system is really mostly state-run. Meanwhile, we were not shown around any university, even though Germany boasts schools that are famous all over the world. I was impressed by the principal's presentation of this business school, and by our meeting with a group of students. "We have to do something like this in Poland," I told myself.

I was surprised that in Germany, where you can study for free for up to 10 years, they had a school where one year of studies cost almost 20,000 Deutschmarks and it was very hard to get admitted. "We prefer to pay, because afterwards jobs come looking for us," was what one student told me. The curriculum at that school is extremely diverse and difficult; each student has to spend one semester at a partner school, for example in Portugal or Finland, and they have to cope with communicating in that foreign country.

■ Were you aware of the difficulties involved in establishing a new college?

I had never worked at a university. I had spent my entire professional life in the research laboratory of a giant industrial plant, so I had no idea what it meant to set up a college from scratch. Perhaps that's why I succeeded. I developed the idea over two years, and on Oct. 1, 1991 we launched a two-year college specializing in business studies. It trained medium-level managers and secretaries. The school was established by 27 people who formed a foundation with \$2,000 in initial capital. I have to admit that the first five years were a

time of constant 'begging' for money for the school. But on that first day we had an opening ceremony in the courtyard of the Stadnicki Palace in Nawojowa, near Nowy Sącz, the school's headquarters at the time. Each of the first students, 64 of them in all, paid a fee of \$1,200 per year.

I realized after the first three months that this would be no more than an ordinary little school unless I created something unusual by Polish standards. I decided to take advantage of the experience of the best universities in the world and look for a U.S. partner. This was how we teamed up with the National-Louis University, a private school with a tradition of 100 years. Its main specialty is teacher training, but also business studies. That was how Wyższa Szkoła Biznesu/NLU came into being, which has offered complete BA courses since 1992 and MA courses since 1998. Today students can obtain a Polish master's degree in management, psychology and political studies, a U.S. degree in information technology, and a British degree in business. As we rely on American lecturers we have to maintain a high standard of English. To make sure all the students have a good command of the language, the first year is an intensive English language course. I think this is probably one of the sources of our success.

I also said at the time that 10 years down the line this would be the best business school in Poland. After five years we were first on the ranking list among university-level schools. Over the past 15 years about 7,000 students have graduated from our school. We have had students from 15 countries including China, Canada, the United States, and Turkey. The largest number has come from neighboring countries—Ukraine, Slovakia, and Belarus. The average tuition fee is about zł.6,000 per year; the highest fee, zł.10,000, is for courses taught in English.

■ Who designed the curriculum?

We used the American experience, taking advantage of the National-Louis University curriculum and brand. After two years, we also drew on the experience of another large U.S. university,

the California State University, Fresno, and used a grant they gave us. Thanks to this, a dozen or so experienced U.S. professors taught 27 complete business courses at our school. They defined the high standard of teaching and built the image of the university.

■ Today your school is widely known and valued, but isn't the market changing?

The time has come for us to take the next step. The market developing around us is completely different and more difficult than just a few years ago. It's essential for Poland to build a system for the professional transfer of knowledge and technology from science to business. For this to happen, though, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education needs to promote competition among schools.

Being smug about the current condition of the Polish economy is not a good policy, because our economy still isn't based on stable foundations. After all, 70 percent of Poland's exports are generated by foreign companies operating in Poland. It's wonderful that they're here, but there is no guarantee that some of their owners, oriented toward maximum profits, won't move eastward one day. They'll make more money there because they will pay less for labor while being able to turn out products of comparable quality. One such country is Ukraine, which in the past had a higher technological standing than Poland. That's why we have to develop the research part of our school, to make it the driving force behind new successes.

■ Does this mean that the present time is critical to the future of your school?

Truly great universities emerge only when the highest standard of teaching is accompanied by the development of research that is immediately applied in the economy. Hence the idea for a Multimedia Town, which is an attempt to build something similar to America's Silicon Valley around a small college. We plan to take advantage of the American experience, adapting it to our

conditions. The project will focus mainly on information technology systems and multimedia. We will react to the market's needs.

We decided to focus on an area that we believe is 100 percent certain to develop. The government has added our idea to a list of key projects. Of course, the Multimedia Town project is a way of strengthening the school and improving its standing as an institution that combines research and education.

■ How will your project benefit the city of Nowy Sącz?

For the first time, I have the support of not only the city authorities, but also the people. Sometimes this support is so huge that it sends shivers down my spine. Because, if we failed, I would probably have to flee Nowy Sącz. WSB-NLU graduates are one very strong group that is pushing for the project to be carried out. I would like to be an adviser for the project.

■ Where will you find the money for such a huge undertaking?

So far we have collected about zł.100 million (28 million euros) to set up a technological park, while the entire project, including hiring people, will cost about zł.500 million, according to our estimates. We plan to start out in 2009 with the construction of the technological park in Nowy Sącz.

We are the first Polish college to have set up its own cluster of multimedia companies and information technology systems; these form the nucleus of the Multimedia Town and are already working with one another. There are 50 of them so far, including companies such as Lightcraft, HyperCrew, Ideo, Enzo, Novitus, Looksfot, and Mobile Experts. The first projects have already been developed.

■ Does this mean that the main role of the technological park will be to nurture new projects?

A special investment fund is being set up by a company established for this purpose in association with our school.

It will provide help to anyone who has a great idea but is short of funds to make this idea a reality. This also applies to those who do have the money, but lack the technical capacity to implement their projects. The technological park will include not only research labs but also project implementation units. We want as many companies as possible to use our park. Nowy Sącz will change enormously if 500, or maybe even

2,000, companies are set up around the city and our school as part of the Multimedia Town.

■ **When will the Multimedia Town start bringing tangible benefits?**

I think it will take 10 years before the project begins to produce results. Wyższa Szkoła Biznesu will be an intellectual base that will train specialists.

We plan to start engineering courses and expand the curriculum considerably. We want to be open to others. The point isn't for Multimedia Town projects to have an advantage over other projects submitted from elsewhere. We want to become a magnet for projects and ideas that will be applied in business once they're completed.

I would like to see at least 20 centers like ours developing in Poland.