“A festival with politics in the background” or “A celebration of exclusive freedom”? Perception of Woodstock Station/Pol’and’Rock Festival in opinion-forming Polish press

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ABSTRACT
The Pol’and’Rock Festival, formerly Woodstock Station, is Poland’s largest music festival. The aim of this article is to show how opinion shaping magazine articles across political spectrum framed Woodstock Station/Pol’and’Rock Festival between 2014 and 2020. This period has proven crucial in shaping the current political scene in Poland, but was also significant for the event itself, due to the change of its name. Concepts and methods: the research presented here is rooted in discourse analysis, investigating not only the explicit statements made, but also the less obvious language used. The analysis is both quantitative, done using MAXQDA program, and qualitative through a closer look at examples of the most interesting paragraphs. Overall, 85 articles from five weekly magazines (“Polityka”, “Wprost”, “Gość Niedzielny”, “W Sieci” and “Do Rzeczy”) were examined. Results: the main results can be described as showing Station Woodstock/Pol’and’Rock Festival mainly through a sociological and political lens, rather than one focusing on artistic merits of the event. The articles mainly described the audience’s activities and the declared views of the organizers. However, there is a noticeable difference between how these were treated across the political spectrum, with liberal and progressive weeklies presenting them in a more favorable light, while the more conservative titles were critical. Research value: overall, the research shows that Station Woodstock/Pol’and’Rock Festival is an event that incites considerable sociological and political debate, reflecting the polarization in contemporary Polish society. As such, it can be seen as contributing to the research of how politics get reflected in topics relating to arts.

KEYWORDS
critical discourse analysis, Pol’and’Rock Festival, music festival, press analysis, Woodstock Station
The Pol’and’Rock Festival – previously known for over 20 years as Woodstock Station – is one of the most distinctive and interesting music festivals in Poland. Established in 1995 by Jerzy (Jurek) Owsiak, a music journalist and the founder of the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity (Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy or WOŚP, translation following Chmielewska-Szlajfer, 2019), as a way of thanking the volunteers of this noble organization, it is held annually for free for anyone wishing to attend. WOŚP’s main aim is to collect money for medical devices, usually with different target sums and specific goals. After decades of communist regime, the idea that healthcare was an issue that could find funds from the private sector was an absolute novelty for Poles. Chmielewska-Szlajfer (2019) views this joyful, musical form of grassroots collective action for public benefit as a sign of reinvigoration of community as a whole. She also points out that WOŚP challenged Catholic Church’s “monopoly on charity”. This denomination was one of the few organizations that were given some liberty under the soviet regime, which it utilized effectively for charitable acts. On the other hand, this created the vision of charity as fundamentally somber, and WOŚP’s festive approach was seen as not only a competition, but a kind of travesty. This lies at the root of sometimes hostile tensions between the Foundation and the Church, and in result the conservative circles. What must be pointed out is that WOŚP was an absolute revolution on the Polish civic landscape, challenging both the state’s capacity to address all healthcare needs and the clerical vision of charity.

Since Polish law allows public benefit organizations to spend a part of their budget on their own goals, Owsiak decided to use this amount to organize a free music festival. Initially limited in scope, over time the event started to attract audiences and musicians from abroad, such as Judas Priest in 2018 and Archive in 2020. Although the festival is usually associated with rock music and its various sub-genres, it also grew to include other types of music and forms of artistic expression, as well as interviews and lectures by figures from the world of culture and politics. While this may be partly due to its status as a free event, it is also the largest Polish festival in terms of audience size – with 250,000 attendees in 2017, for example (Owsiak, Wasilewska, & Dzierżanowski, 2018) – as well as one of the oldest events of its type established after the socio-economic transformation following the dismantling of the USSR. As such, Woodstock Station has witnessed some of the most significant changes in Poland within the last few decades, the emergence of liberal political and economic systems, the opening of its borders, and the country’s accession to NATO and European Union being among the most notable. On the whole, it can be stated that Woodstock Station has evolved significantly over the years, often reflecting the more general changes happening in Poland, and these processes seem worth researching more closely. The aim of this article is to show how these changes were reflected in the Polish opinion-forming press, as well as what the general public discourse was surrounding the event.

To a significant extent, the choice of the analyzed period was motivated the festival’s name change, which was related to copyright issues. The original name clearly alluded to the legendary festival from 1969, whose legacy was intended to be branded in the latter half of the 2010s. The Polish festival would still be able to use the name, but only after securing proper legal arrangements. Owsiak, deciding he preferred the festival to remain independent, changed its name instead (Pęczak, 2018). Throughout this article, the event will be referred to as Woodstock Station/Pol’and’Rock Festival (WS/P’a’R for short – used only in the main text and not when quoting magazine articles) when reflecting on its entire history, and by one of these names only in the context of the corresponding years.

While selecting the articles for analysis, there were three main criteria. First, the popularity and influence of a given magazine in the year 2020, as reported by the Institute of Media Monitoring (Instytut Monitorowania Mediów, 2021). Weekly magazines seem to be a reasonable compromise...
between daily news reports, which are often just short announcements, and monthly analyses, which may fail to grasp the more spontaneous reactions regarding the main festival event, as well as any surrounding discussions. The second practical criterion was that of a given magazine’s availability during the COVID-19 pandemic when many libraries were closed: editions available online were not only more practical for quantitative analysis but also reliably accessible. The downside of this practice was that digital versions are only available since approximately 1999. However, taking into account that some of these titles only came into existence in the current century, as well as the focus on the years directly surrounding the transition of WS to the P’a’R, the gains seemed to outweigh the losses. These two criteria led to the selection of five weekly opinion-forming magazines, namely: “Do Rzeczy”, “Gość Niedzielny”, “Polityka”, “Wprost” and “W Sieci”. Lastly, it is important that only the articles that were published in a printed format were taken into account. This is noteworthy, since different magazines have different practices regarding their websites.

On the theoretical level, the proposed analysis is based on a discourse analysis. This framework should help create a more precise picture of the ways in which the P’a’R functions in Polish press discourse, as well as how the various events in its recent history have been received by the general public, and, in turn, how this reception may have affected the organizers. The structure of this article will be as follows: first, the theoretical frameworks for analyzing the articles on WS/P’a’R will be presented, followed by an outline of the magazine titles taken into account with regards to their history and the ideological stances they represent. Following some notes regarding the tools used for the analysis, the results of the quantitative research on all the analyzed articles will be presented, followed by a qualitative exemplification of exact quotes from selected texts. Finally, these results will be analyzed through the theoretical framework provided at the beginning, hopefully providing deeper insight into the cultural significance of the change from Woodstock Station to the Pol’and’Rock Festival.

Theory and hypothetical attitude indicators
The goal of this paragraph is to present the main claims of the theoretical framework used in this study, namely discourse analysis, and to suggest what language behaviours may indicate certain attitudes towards the WS/P’a’R. These theories will be revisited after the main analysis.

Discourse analysis (DA for short) was developed in the second half of the 20th century, largely in response to criticisms that language studies ignored the actual use of language (Lisowska-Magdziarz, 2006). It is assumed that by studying not only what things are uttered, but also how they are uttered, and even what things are not uttered, an analyst can gain deeper understanding of the social and cultural perspectives represented by the author and their milieu, perhaps most importantly those that appear too obvious to be acknowledged. More specifically, critical discourse analysis (CDA for short) is, according to Fairclough (2013), relational, it deals with relationships between entities rather than the entities themselves. CDA is dialectical, meaning the relationships are constantly changing under each other’s influence, and realist, treating the world, including the social world, as existing independently of individual perceptions. Fairclough’s approach has also been summarized as follows: “the model of discourse [Fairclough] develops is framed in a theory of ideological processes in society, for discourse is seen in terms of processes of hegemony and changes in hegemony” (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 449).

The following analysis also fits, to a certain extent, within a branch of CDA known as Political Discourse Analysis (PDA). As the name suggests, its main characteristic is the application of the tools developed within the wider theory to politics. Although some classic theoreticians, including van Dijk, view PDA as applicable only to major, official political players (elected
politicians), others extend this approach to other public sphere actors. In Dunmire’s article (2012) discussing this framework, she mentions Okulska and Cap, who elect “the term »analysis of political discourse« (APD), and conceive it as socially oriented studies of »polity and/or politics, located at the intersection of political/public discourse and political/social institutions«” (p. 736). When this kind of approach is applied, it seems justified to include journalism in the area that can be studied through PDA.

Generally, CDA has been widely applied in analyses of texts as diverse as official political discussions, press articles, and advertisements. According to van Dijk (1993), this approach not only allows but practically necessitates that the researcher be socially engaged and aim to effect real-world change through their research. However, this postulate has been criticized by Schegloff, who pointed out that CDA researchers tend to assume what problems are socially relevant and then search for indicators of power abuse in the language (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). Thus, the approach may lack in academic rigor due to searching for specific language behaviors which would confirm its statements, rather than allowing behavioral patterns to emerge on their own from the texts. Keeping in mind this limitation of the theoretical approach used here, it is difficult to argue against the idea that language can both express the author’s attitude and shape that of the reader.

Another problem with applying CDA to the research presented here relates to the issue of translation. Since this analysis relies on translations (conducted by the author herself) of selected passages from Polish to English, it would be problematic to use the more subtle, linguistic branch of critical CDA. Instead, this research is based on textual analysis – that is, the focus is on the content and more obvious elements of language. The type of analysis suggested by van Dijk or Fairclough relies on deeply rooted collocations and cultural associations, that color even apparently neutral words, making it very difficult to apply to a local language while ensuring the analysis is understandable for a global reader. At the same time, it should be remembered that translation itself involves interpretation, for instance, by choosing one word over its synonym. Nonetheless, it was deemed more important to translate the contents of the analyzed articles, rather than try to capture every linguistic subtlety. Where an idiomatic expression is necessary for understanding the sentence, it is explained in a footnote.

Since the introduction of DA into wide academic use, there have been successful attempts at combining it with quantitative approach, which is a trend this article also follows. The development of computer programs has played an important role in these endeavors, making them relatively easy. For example, by the end of the 20th century, Landauer, Foltz, and Laham were already using such automated tools for latent semantic analysis (Foltz, Kintsch, & Landauer, 1998). In the second decade of the 21st, the combination of quantitative and qualitative text analysis led to the approach known as topic modelling, which Jacobs and Tschötschel (2019) define as a method that aims to reduce the complexity of a large corpus by representing each text as a combination of ‘topics’. It appears that automation of research has blurred the clear barriers between qualitative and quantitative text analysis, allowing researchers to avoid limiting themselves in corpus size or relying purely on statistical methods.

To conclude this theoretical introduction, the most important indicators of discursive themes in the analyzed articles will be enumerated. These include:

– The framing of the event: is the WS/P’a’R framed as a cultural event, or rather from a political or social perspective?
– The use of stylistic tools, such as irony or rhetorical questions.
– Associations with other cultural phenomena: other festivals, religion, etc.
Methods and tools
Before moving on to the presentation of methods and tools used during the analysis, it seems useful to outline the magazines subjected to this process. All the information provided comes from the titles’ websites and articles by Mielczarek (2013) and Dobek-Ostrowska (2018), characterizing the Polish press after the political transformation. The first of these authors bemoans the disappearance of socio-cultural journals, replaced by socio-political ones following the post-1989 transformation. All analyzed magazines currently belong to this latter genre. All the titles are used in an abbreviated form, with the list of abbreviation presented at the end of the article.

“Gość Niedzielny” (translation: “The Sunday Guest”, abbreviation: “GN”) is directed mostly to Roman Catholics with conservative and traditional socio-political outlooks (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2018). On the other hand, “Polityka” (“Politics”, “P”), according to the same author, “consequently supports a common Europe, equal rights for national, ethnic and sexual minorities, aiding weaker and disadvantaged social groups, and argues against xenophobia, conservative values, etc.” (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2018, p. 233).

All of this establishes “Polityka” as a center-left or liberal-left magazine, as it generally supports balancing the free market with providing social welfare.

The journalism of the hard, orthodox Polish right wing is prominently featured in “W Sieci” (translated as “On the Net”), which is interchangeable with “Sieci” (“The Net”). Although the magazine changed its name to the latter in 2017, both titles are still commonly used, and the abbreviation “S” is used to avoid confusion with Woodstock Station. This conservative, right-wing journalism is also seen in “Do Rzeczy” (“To the Point”, abbreviated as “DR”). Since both titles have their roots in the same magazine (“Rzeczpospolita”) and often publish articles by the same authors, it is not surprising that they represent a similar socio-cultural stance: conservative, right-wing, and aimed at a well-educated readership.

Of all the titles analyzed in this article, “Wprost” (translation: “Up front”, “W”) has by far the most varied history. During the time period analyzed here, “Wprost” maintained a largely centrist but harshly critical attitude towards Poland’s current situation, which, combined with a high turnover of its published authors, failed to attract new readers (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2018). This resulted in the magazine ceasing its printed format in 2020 and continuing only online.

The above description of the magazine titles analyzed in this article aims to help the global reader understand their specific nature and clarify why they were selected. This should assist in better understanding the rest of the text, which is devoted to the analysis itself.

The research in this article combines quantitative and qualitative methods of textual analysis, presented in this order. First, quantitative coding of the press articles was conducted using the MAXQDA program, followed by exemplification of the quotes deemed either the most representative of a given press title’s attitude towards the WS/P’a’R, or the most interesting, often also meaning the most exceptional. The two main axes of analysis here are the socio-political division between different titles and the year of publication of the given article, with the division between years 2014–2017 (the last four years when the event was called Woodstock Station) and 2018–2020 (the first three years when it was called the Pol’and’Rock Festival). What follows is precise information about the number of articles from different titles, the codes used, and the units of analysis applied.

The preliminary research was conducted using simple search tools available on the websites of all five titles analyzed. The search keywords were “Przystanek Woodstock” and “Pol’and’Rock”. Articles returned were then subjected to a quick check on the respective
website to see if the terms found truly corresponded to the topic of this research, as it was not uncommon for the websites’ infrastructures to return articles containing only one of the searched-for words. A quick search of the articles for verification purposes also ensured that only texts published in the print copies of the magazines were analyzed, in order that texts quoted from different sources could be filtered out. There were two exceptions from this rule, caused by the fact that “W” stopped coming out in a printed form in March 2020, there being two relevant articles relating to the P’a’R from following months. As both were published by this magazine, it was deemed suitable to include them as well. The selected texts were then saved in PDF format, although sometimes it was necessary to purchase the full edition and then cut out the relevant pages, which was done using the program PDFsam. The resulting corpus of analyzed articles consisted of 85 texts of varying length, with 37 from “P”, 20 from “W”, 18 from “S”, 10 from “GN”, and 5 from “DR”.

The primary analysis was conducted using the program MAXQDA, with paragraphs as the main unit of analysis. This was deemed the most appropriate approach, as it allows for identifying how often the WS/P’a’R was associated with broader topics without overcrowding the data by considering every sentence. In the case of interviews, the units of analysis were the answers given by the interviewees. If the text was a short piece of information or commentary, it was considered as a single paragraph. The titles and headers were not considered in the analysis for two reasons: first, not all texts had them, and second, they were mostly succinct reiterations of attitudes expressed in the main article. Large and highlighted statements scattered throughout the text were analyzed, provided they were not quotes from the main article.

The codes used and their short descriptions are listed below.

- Art – references to performers, music, and other artistic activities offered by the festival, both as raw information and reflections on them;
- Logistics – simple information on the dates, accommodation, and safety precautions, festival’s publicity, and sponsors;
- Society – commentaries on audience behavior, demographic makeup, but also on wider social significance of the festival, including interactions with external organizations;
- Politics – references to political figures or opinions expressed by organizers and artists;
- Owsiak/WOŚP – situations when the festival is directly linked to its leader, Owsiak, or WOŚP, with subdivision into references to one of the two;
- Exemplification – additional code, not used in quantitative analysis, only to help find best quotes for qualitative part.

Results
The following subchapter will be devoted to presenting the research results. It will begin with the quantitative data, focusing on the frequencies of different codes and their correlation with various press titles. Following this brief overview, a qualitative analysis will follow of examples of some of the more interesting and representative quotes from the magazines analyzed here.

Quantitative analysis
Table 1 (see below) shows the frequencies of different codes used in the corpus. It is clear that the most frequent code was “Society”, used over twice as often as the next most common, “Logistics”. The code “Politics” was used nearly as much as “Logistics”, though it is worth reiterating that while coding it was sometimes difficult to determine if a paragraph was more related to politics or sociological topics. Finally, it is striking how rarely the festival was directly referenced in terms of its artistic program. The code “Art” the least frequently used, which may
be partly due to the separation of topics related to artists between this code and “Logistics”. Even so, the lack of reflections on the P’a’R’s artistic offerings is noteworthy.

Table 1. Frequencies of different codes, author’s own work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistics</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owsiak/WOŚP</td>
<td>33 (27/6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The general information on the codes used, combined with the socio-political differentiation of the magazines analyzed, suggests that the frequencies of different codes in separate titles may also be of interest. Table 2 shows the results of such a cross-tabulation, produced by MAXQDA.

Table 2. Code frequencies in separate magazine titles, author’s own work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>“Do Rzeczy”</th>
<th>“Polityka”</th>
<th>“W Sieci”</th>
<th>“Wprost”</th>
<th>“Gość Niedzielny”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owsiak</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOŚP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUM</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The resulting cross-tabulation indeed points towards some interesting phenomena that will hopefully be clarified in a qualitative exemplification. First of all, it is worth noting that despite there being more than twice as many articles from “P” than from “S”, the frequencies of direct references to the P’a’R are almost the same at 114 and 104, respectively. Additionally, while both press titles had similar numbers of paragraphs coded as “Politics” and “Society”, “P” had much more coverage on the artistic aspects of the festival, either in the form of performance reviews or as raw information on the time and space the events took place. On the other hand, “S” appears to be much more interested in Owsiak as a person, while rarely associating either him or the music event with WOŚP. Indeed, as will be exemplified below, WS/P’a’R was often referenced in the context of Owsiak’s wider activity, rather than the reverse, where the event’s description involved its organizer.

Another interesting observation from Table 2 is that “W” is the only title where “Society” was not the most frequent code – and was used less often than both “Logistics” and “Politics”. This may indicate that this magazine’s interests lie more in official organized politics than in social and cultural aspects. However, as mentioned, it was often difficult to distinguish between the two codes. Thus, sometimes the difference lay in whether any politicians or parties were mentioned by name or not. The two possibilities are not mutually exclusive; indicate a focus on official politics or a decision to view the events politically. This would correspond to “W’s” self-image as a very straightforward magazine.
Qualitative analysis

Moving on to the qualitative analysis of selected quotes, the selected quotes will be presented in an order roughly corresponding to the right-left wing political and social outlooks observed in the quantitative data presented above. Thus, the analysis will begin with texts from “S” and “DR”, followed by “GN” and “W”, and ending with those from “P”. In addition to maintaining proportionality to the number of articles from each title, the selected quotes illustrate two types of analyzed articles: those specifically devoted to the WS/P’a’R and those mentioning the festival in an artistic, political, or social context.

The first quote comes from a “DR” article:

“Whoever put [the Ferris wheel\(^1\)] next to the stage, hit the bull’s eye. It would be hard to find a better metaphor of this party. The image of the event created by Owsiak, so drastically diverging from reality, is indeed a trick of the devil. The fact that a few hundred thousands young people willingly choose to get battered is also likely to be a foul doing.” (Pospieszalski, 2015, p. 38).

While the text is entirely devoted to the festival, it can hardly be called a review of the artistic event. The most obvious stylistic tool used here is the comparison of WS/P’a’R to a theme park attraction that, in Polish, has a name that evokes associations with the devil, allowing the author to also insinuate that there is something foul and tricky in the way the festival is presented outwardly, as opposed to “the truth” about it, as perceived by the writer. This quote seems very appropriate to begin the analysis since, as will be seen later, Satanic associations are a recurring theme in the conservative-leaning press. For example:

“There is a forest on the left-hand side, I enter it untrustingly. If it is anything like the beginning, I’m off. It is not so bad, though there is a couple of unconscious people on the edge. Completely senseless, lying face down, no one cares about them, no one seems to be impressed. In the middle of the road there walks a boy dressed, despite the high temperature, in trousers with long black bristles, a similar vest, and red horns. The Devil?” (Wikło, 2014, p. 18).

This 2014 article by Marcin Wikło, who spontaneously decided to attend WS and later shared his reflections on it in “S”, reflects on the perceived moral degradation among the festival’s audience. The same is also the case with another article in “S”:

“The atmosphere of “full chill”, ruling over Owsiak’s gatherings, has maintained and is still maintaining hedonistic attitudes, sometimes taking on almost barbaric forms. However, what is probably much worse, it is accompanied by the brainwashing of intellectually and mentally unformed young brain, into which an illusory definition of freedom is implanted. Owsiak’s “do what ya want” is, after all, limited to the cultural matters, confined to the mud and shrubs. There is no talk of any “do what ya want” in the public or worldview matters. There is no choice, there is only one way here. If you choose any other path, you will lose your beloved mud and your shrubs. It is difficult to call this respect for young people.” (Kołodziejski, 2018, p. 46).

This last quote is interesting in that rather than discussing only the social aspects of the audience behavior, it touches on official politics, suggesting that behind Owsiak’s facade of openness, there is a clear political agenda guiding the youth towards left-wing politics. Interestingly, this perception, rooted in Poland’s negative experiences with the socialist regime, also extends to the original Woodstock festival in the 1960s USA:

\(^1\) Ferris wheel is called “diabelski młyn”, “devil’s mill” in Polish, hence the following pun.
“Secondly, this event recalls – only in name? – the Woodstock Music and Art Fair, a music festival from August 1969 which took place in the USA. It is an open secret that this was a leftist undertaking, deeply rooted in a campaign of eroding the States from within by Soviet agents of influence. Years later the facts emerge exposing the backstage of the hippie movement, pseudopacifist campaigns, and calls such as “The Do It Revolution” (also the title of a hippie movement pamphlet). This is enough for me to approach the word “Woodstock” with caution, wherever I encounter it.” (Nałaskowski, 2017, p. 93).

Generally speaking, the attitude towards the WS/P’a’R as expressed by “DR” and “S” can be described as highly critical of the event, with the main focus on the social and political aspects of its audience. This fact makes it even more interesting considering that the authors were actually rather approving of the music played at the festival. This contrast makes it sound as if either the music was not a significant part of the event, or at least it was not considered to be so in the writers’ perceptions. The most important discursive aspect of the analyzed quotes, however, is their emotional and ironic tone. Their apparently negative attitude is expressed not only in what is written, but also in how it was written, including ironic rhetorical questions and multiple comparisons of the festival to the infernal realms and their inhabitants.

The texts from “DR” and “S”, particularly their characteristics summarized above, are interesting when juxtaposed with articles from “GN”. Even though this Catholic journal’s authors also appear critical of the WS/P’a’R, the language used is much milder, as in the following passage:

“The three-day retreat concluded with an evangelizing procession that walked down the field’s main avenues. This is the official welcoming of the stationeers to Woodstock. One of the greatest music events in Europe – the Pol’and’Rock Festival – is attended by several hundred thousand people. Among them, there are punks with colorful hair, heavy metal fans in heavy boots, girls in bras, and homosexuals. Someone walks in a cassock, wearing a likeness of Father Tadeusz Rydzyk on their face, another in a gas mask and a cap with earflaps. There are students, too, sometimes whole families. The homeless and the followers of Svetovid. Buddhists, Luciferians and sorcerers.” (Ślusarczyk, 2018, acc. 6).

The tone of this quote is very neutral, giving the appearance of an objective description of the people attending P’a’R. It is difficult to tell if the author is critical of the audience’s diversity, approving of it, or merely cautiously interested. The language does not express a definitely negative attitude towards “heavy metal fans in heavy boots, girls in bras and homosexuals”, however, association of “the homeless and the followers of Svetovid” with “Buddhists, Luciferians and sorcerers” is rather striking, especially in a Catholic publication. Probably the most remarkable aspect of the articles in “GN,” however, is the theme of evangelization through Jesus Station – a music festival taking place at a similar time and place as WS, but offering Christian values and music. While the concept that people at the P’a’R need evangelization is itself somewhat curious, the language and stated goals are not hostile towards them. This can be seen in a 2016 interview with Bishop Dajczak, the creator of Jesus Station:

“Evangelization begins with listening. If someone at Jesus Station cannot listen to people from Woodstock, then they have no chance. One must first humbly and patiently hear them out, even the many bitter things. Afterwards very interesting and beautifully fruitful conversations begin. But if we continuously say “do this, this and this”, and do not listen, we will be passing each other by.” (Dajczak & Jaklewicz, 2016, acc. 11).
The last two quotes suggest that the writers for “GN” are not condemning the event in the same manner as “DR” and “S” do. They express an openness to dialogue with those attending this event and avoid commenting on the attendees’ lifestyles and behavior during the concerts. There is, however, one main doubt which makes it difficult to gauge the magazine’s outlook on the festival, namely: does the belief that certain groups of people (“girls in bras, homosexuals, Buddhists and followers of Svetovid”) need evangelization assume that it is always good to further promote Christian values, or that the P’a’R’s participants are morally corrupt?

As mentioned in the general presentation of the analyzed publications, “W” is the one most interested in discussing official politics. This is well exemplified by the following passage:

“The right wing has been having problems with Jerzy Owsiak’s activities for a while now – with his campaigns aimed at raising funds for healthcare equipment, which pushes all other charities into the shadows, including those organized by Caritas2, or with the anarchic call of Woodstock Station, “Do what ya want”. Last year this was manifested by Marcin Wolski, writing in one of the right-wing newspapers: “There is an opportunity to get rid of annoying Owsiaks and other human worms”.” (Olczyk, 2017, p. 14).

This quote stands out in that it is one of the rare cases of a press article commenting on another publication’s attitude towards the festival. As such, it can be viewed as a second-degree discourse analysis: not only does it analyze a phenomenon in its own right, but it also comments on how it is framed in a different source, thus commenting on discourse itself. The selection of a particularly critical sentence by Wolski suggests that “W” itself maintains a more positive attitude towards Owsiak and his festival. However, another article shows that this magazine is not entirely approving of them:

“I did not come to [Owsiak] with any prejudice, I did not want to attack and make charges against him. I just had questions regarding the Orchestra’s finances and enterprises, including the commercial enterprises that have emerged around it, such as the Golden Melon company. I wanted to learn how all this is organized. Not all of my questions received answers. Owsiak was reacting with increasing irritation, impatience, even though I was beyond nice and polite. Throughout this conversation, my interlocutor seemed to suggest that all of this was unnecessary and merely nitpicking about details. I was persuading him that, given the large public donations involved, the questions were justified. We parted on friendly terms.” (Majewski, 2015, p. 9).

This can be viewed as summary of “W’s” attitude towards the WS/P’a’R, as well as Owsiak himself, at least during the time studied: generally friendly, but aware of potential problems with the organization, and seemingly willing to offer constructive criticism that supporters of WOŚP need, as the author implies. Rather than comparing the audience to the denizens of hell, “W” appears to criticize Owsiak for his own good.

Although the WS/P’a’R is also framed in political terms in “P’s” articles, it is mostly framed positively. In fact, the authors in this magazine frequently respond directly to the criticisms leveled against the festival by the right-wing press, as seen in the following text:

“The most valuable fake news is prepared based on “reports” from the foreign press. For example, photographs of a naked girl, apparently splashing in the mud on Woodstock Station, are sourced from “The Sun”. Besides its greater trustworthiness – because this is global press after all – this move has an additional goal: making the reader feel embarrassed. This is how the world perceives us.

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2 Catholic Church episcopate run charity, often juxtaposed with the Great Orchestra as the “correct” way to help those in need.
A Pole is a naked, pot-bellied man with a naked woman in the mud. The associations with pigs are obvious. The goal – causing indignation at the nudity, the embarrassment – the publication appears abroad, and the deep emotional aversion towards the opposition and any form of disagreement with the government. The graceful-sounding title is: “Splashing in the mud against the government”.” (Bierzyński, 2017, acc. 13).

This quote comes from an article analyzing propaganda used by conservative journalists, which makes the use of WS/P’a’R as an example doubly interesting, as it situates the event in the broader political life of Poland and provides a set of discursive tools. Thus, by showing how a right-wing portrayal of the event is created, the author suggests that it is entirely selective and therefore incorrect. Additionally, in one review of the festival, an ironic is made to the infernal associations found in right-wing articles:

“The place was young, crowded, and almost painfully familiar. The Kostrzyn hills, covered in colorful tents, resembled a steppe nomads’ yurt field. Amid all this, people with Jesus Station badges walked around, sometimes looking a little scared. They looked around much like Byzantines must have looked at the tents of the sultan’s army besieging Constantinople.” (Szczerek, 2017, acc. 10).

Overall, “P’s” expressed attitude towards the festival is the most positive of all the analyzed titles. It should also be noted that, rather than showing particular examples of disturbing audience behavior or questioning the organizers’ trustworthiness, its authors prefer to present a general overview of the event. Of course, from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, the crucial question remains as follows: is this overview an act of covering up the truth through language, or is it the right wing press’s focus on negative details that constitutes the distortion of truth through language?

Discussion
In this last subchapter, the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses described above will be framed in the context of the earlier questions concerning the discourse observed in the Polish press regarding the WS/P’a’R. Generally speaking, it is apparent that a given magazine’s attitude towards the festival is strongly linked to its position on the socio-political right-left spectrum. Although “DR” and “S” maintained a rather critical outlook on both of the event and its main organizer, “GN” was less hostile towards it, apparently open to dialogue with its audience. However, “W” and “P” expressed mainly positive feelings towards it, with the former more likely to frame it politically and to be more constructively critical. The perception of the same event as either “A festival with politics in the background” or “A celebration of exclusive freedom” appears to clearly correspond with journalists’ progressive or conservative worldviews. Indeed, both descriptions come directly from articles’ titles (respectively: Szczerek, 2017; Fijołek & Zuchniewicz, 2014).

Overall, it can be said that the WS/P’a’R was mainly analyzed from the perspective of the behavior of its audience or Owsiak’s political stance, with the artistic aspect remaining in the background. Although “P” featured a few more articles analyzing it as an artistic event, mainly mentioning it in texts about broader phenomena in artistic life, “W” provided more information on where and when the festival took place. The right-wing titles were less likely to refer to the WS/P’a’R from an artistic point of view, though when this topic did appear, it was usually viewed favorably, with “GN” expressing very positive views on at least one of the performing artists.

When it comes to stylistic tools used in the analyzed articles, it seems that right-wing titles are more inclined to use emotional language and rhetorical devices, although “P” and “W” also featured some of the latter. It appears that the WS/P’a’R is widely viewed as an event...
directed at people with more left-wing and liberal views, and depending on the writer’s own, it is viewed either very positively or very negatively. Interestingly, “GN” appears to use the most neutral language, despite WS usually being juxtaposed with Jesus Station, which receives more coverage and can itself be viewed as a discursive tool. Jesus Station is also the main artistic phenomenon with which the studied festival is most closely associated, even more so than the original Woodstock Festival of 1969. It is also worth noting that the right-wing press sometimes uses religious imagery (such as “the devil’s wheel”) in its criticisms, which “P’s” left-wing journalists occasionally mock.

The alignment of perceptions of Woodstock Station/Pol’and’Rock Festival across the political spectrum and the accompanying difference in discourse highlights an aspect related to hegemony. It appears that, rather than a single unifying framework through which the event is analyzed and its ‘taken for granted’ aspects, there is a plurality of frameworks. Each journal represents its own set of values and either praises or criticizes the festival accordingly. This observation can be interpreted both positively and negatively. The positive aspect is that this can be seen as a symptom of a truly pluralistic society, where different perspective are free to coexist in the same public sphere. More pessimistically, it would seem that there is a significant division in Poland, with various groups following completely different sets of values, which is reflected in the language. This, in its own right, may still be seen as a sign of a flawed but functioning democracy. The occasional hostility towards the other side of this division, exhibited in articles from the full political spectrum, is harder to defend in this fashion.

On the whole, the Woodstock Station/Pol’and’Rock Festival appears to be one of the topics that is very symptomatic of much of the public discourse in Poland. Over the few years analyzed in this article, this music festival has been discussed as a tool of youth’s moral degradation, the heir to 1969 Woodstock’s Soviet-style agenda, but also the victim of manipulation and one of the few spheres of open public dialogue left in the country. In light of this polarized discourse, it can only be hoped that the music festival might indeed prove to be an environment for discussions aimed at bridging this gap.

List of abbreviations
CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis
DA – Discourse Analysis
DR – “Do Rzeczy”
GN – “Gość Niedzielny”
P – “Polityka”
P’a’R – Pol’and’Rock Festival
PDA – Political Discourse Analysis
S – “W Sieci”/”Sieci”
W – “Wprost”
WOŚP – Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy (the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity)
WS – Woodstock Station

Bibliography


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**Sources**


