

THE INFLUENCE OF CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTHCARE IN POLAND: ANALYSIS ON THE EXAMPLE OF MYŚLENICE

ADAM STYCZEŃ¹, ZUZANA BUDAYOVÁ²

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59505/IRHNS.22352007.2025.3.02>

¹ Catholic University in Ružomberok,
Faculty of Theology,
Theological Institute in Spišské Podhradie,
Slovakia

² Catholic University in Ružomberok,
Faculty of Theology,
Theological Institute in Spišské Podhradie,
Slovakia

Contact: Mgr Adam Styczeń - astyczen@op.pl;
doc. PhDr. Mgr., Zuzana Budayová, PhD., M.Ed. - zuzana.budayova@ku.sk

Abstract:

Charitable support plays a significant role in the development of the Polish healthcare system, especially in the area of providing modern medical equipment and improving the quality of care in hospitals. A significant initiative in this area is the Great Orchestra of Christmas Relief (WOŚP) Foundation, which has been contributing to the modernization of healthcare facilities through nationwide collections for a long time. The foundation's contributions have enabled many hospitals, including the hospital in Myślenice, to acquire key life-saving devices and improve the accessibility of healthcare. In addition to WOŚP, financial donations, volunteering, community collections and partnerships with public institutions also play

an important role, which together form the systemic support for hospitals. These forms of assistance represent an important element of solidarity and enable healthcare facilities to respond to the challenges of modern medicine.

Key words: charity, healthcare, hospitals, WOŚP, donation, non-profit organizations, volunteering

Introduction

Charitable support plays a crucial role in the functioning of the Polish healthcare system, particularly in the context of assisting hospitals, which often face shortages of modern medical equipment or financial resources necessary for daily operations. Charitable initiatives not only enable the purchase of life-saving apparatus but also support medical personnel and improve patient comfort.

One of the most well-known and recognized initiatives in Poland is the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity Foundation (WOŚP). Since its inception, the foundation has systematically supported Polish hospitals by organizing nationwide fundraising campaigns and social events, allowing for the acquisition of modern medical equipment such as ventilators, patient monitors, incubators, and imaging diagnostic devices. Thanks to WOŚP's efforts, many healthcare facilities across the country, both in large cities and smaller towns, have been able to enhance the standard of medical care. An example is the hospital in Myślenice, which, through WOŚP support, received essential medical equipment for saving the lives of newborns and adult patients, significantly improving the quality of care and the safety of the region's residents.

In addition to the activities of WOŚP, hospitals benefit from many other forms of charitable support, including:

- **Financial and in-kind donations** – from both individuals and corporations, which enable hospitals to purchase equipment, medicines, personal protective equipment, or to furnish wards and departments.
- **Medical and non-medical volunteering** – volunteers contribute by assisting patients, providing administrative support, organizing educational events, or caring for children and elderly patients.
- **Community fundraising and educational campaigns** – organized by local associations, foundations, schools, or groups of residents, often combining material assistance with raising public awareness about health and preventive care.

- **Partnership projects and collaboration with public institutions** – programs implemented in cooperation with local governments, NGOs, and foundations, aiming, for example, to modernize hospital wards, equip diagnostic laboratories, or develop telemedicine initiatives.

All these forms of support demonstrate that charitable assistance is not limited to one-time fundraising events but constitutes a systemic form of aid for hospitals, which in many cases is essential for maintaining a high level of medical care. In smaller towns, such as Mysłenice, such initiatives are particularly significant, as they enable the local hospital to provide residents with access to modern diagnostics and treatment that is often beyond the scope of the standard hospital budget.

Charitable support is therefore not only an expression of social solidarity and responsibility but also a practical tool that fosters the development of Polish medicine, allowing hospitals to meet the challenges of modern healthcare and save patients' lives.

Charity

Charity refers to actions aimed at providing assistance to those in need in a selfless, benevolent, and philanthropic manner. In a strict sense, it is rooted in Christian religious philanthropy. The term derives from the Latin word *caritas*, which denotes mercy or Christian love towards the poor. In everyday usage, “charity” and “philanthropy” are sometimes used interchangeably; however, they differ in an important aspect. Charity is typically motivated by religious obligation, whereas philanthropy draws inspiration from the secular idea of humanitarianism.

A charitable organization, or charity institution, is a general term for institutions whose purpose is to support poor individuals and those requiring assistance.¹

The Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity (WOŚP) is the largest non-governmental, non-profit charitable organization in Poland. The initiative began with “Brum,” a Friday broadcast by Jerzy Owsiak on Program III of Polish Radio, where spontaneous donations sent in envelopes or via transfers were directed to children with congenital heart defects. The name “Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity” was first used by Owsiak in the television program *Róbta co chceta* during the 1991 Christmas holidays. The first charity concert under

1 Doktór, K. (2010). *Organizacje pozarządowe w Polsce*. Difin.

the WOŚP banner took place in spring 1992 in Ciechocinek, featuring the band *Zdrowa Woda* performing with Jerzy Owsiak. Another fundraising event was organized during the Jarocin Festival. On January 3, 1993, a collection of funds for the Pediatric Cardiac Surgery Department at the Children's Health Center in Warsaw was launched, initiated by Owsiak on the TVP2 music program *Róbta co chceta*. The event culminated in a charity finale held both at the TVP2 studio in Warsaw and in several other Polish cities. During this first Finale, over 31 billion old Polish zlotys were raised, which were used to purchase essential medical equipment not only for the Children's Health Center in Warsaw but also for ten Pediatric Cardiac Surgery Departments across Poland.

Following the success of this initial fundraising, Owsiak decided to establish the WOŚP Foundation, which was officially registered on June 1, 1993. He co-founded it with Lidia Niedźwiedzka-Owsiak, Bohdan Maruszewski, Piotr Burczyński, Paweł Januszewicz, Walter Chełstowski, and Beata Bethke. The WOŚP Finale became a recurring event and an integral part of Polish culture. Each year, concerts, fairs, festivals, and happenings are organized throughout Poland, featuring prominent Polish and international artists, often performing free of charge. Various cultural and sporting events also accompany these activities.²

Every year, over 120,000 volunteers sign up to collect donations on city streets. Local WOŚP headquarters operate in each voivodeship, responsible for initial counting of the funds collected by volunteers and transferring them to the WOŚP account. The most iconic form of fundraising associated with WOŚP is collecting donations in so-called "collection boxes." However, in recent years, WOŚP has increasingly utilized technologically advanced methods of collecting donations, far beyond traditional bank transfers. For example, in the current year, volunteers in 70 cities were equipped with contactless payment terminals³, provided through a partnership with MasterCard and Bank Pekao, enabling donors to contribute simply by tapping a contactless card. The foundation's website offers dozens of alternative ways to donate, including innovative methods such as a special Bitcoin wallet and a partnership with the mobile operator Play, where every view of a dedicated YouTube video resulted in a donation of 10 groszy to WOŚP.

The culmination of WOŚP activities is the annual January fundraising campaign, during which volunteers across the country intensify their efforts. The organization's presence spans major social media platforms such as Facebook,

2 Herbst, J. (2005). *Mapa obywatelska: Podstawowe fakty o organizacjach pozarządowych*. Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor.

3 Makowski, G. (2008). *Państwo a trzeci sektor: Prawo, instytucje, polityka*. Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN.

Twitter, and Instagram, requiring precise planning and coordination to achieve maximum impact.⁴

The Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity Foundation operates in the field of healthcare, with the primary objective of saving the lives of children with heart defects. It functions based on the provisions of the Act on Foundations of April 6, 1984 (Journal of Laws 1991, No. 46, item 203) and its own statutes. Key organizational details include:

- The Foundation has legal personality.
- Its registered office is located in Warsaw.
- Its area of operation is the territory of the Republic of Poland, although it may carry out activities abroad to effectively achieve its social and economic goals.
- The competent minister overseeing the Foundation is the Minister of Health.
- The Foundation uses a round seal with its name inscribed on it.
- It may award honorary badges and medals, as well as other awards, to individuals or legal entities distinguished in supporting the Foundation's goals or the Foundation itself.⁵

The Foundation's mission focuses on healthcare activities, primarily saving the lives of sick individuals, especially children, improving their health, and promoting health and preventive care. The Foundation pursues its goals through:

1. Financial and in-kind support to institutions and facilities engaged in relevant activities.
2. Providing life-saving equipment and devices, purchasing medical tools and materials, and transferring them free of charge to healthcare facilities, including nationwide medical programs and related databases.
3. Analyzing and synthesizing data from these programs and presenting results at scientific conferences in Poland and abroad.
4. Providing social assistance in the form of medical, financial, or rehabilitative aid to individuals with special cases, considering the type of illness, family situation, and financial standing, including victims of traffic accidents.
5. Undertaking actions to prevent and reduce social pathologies, including drug addiction, alcoholism, and violence.
6. Conducting training in medical rescue and first aid, particularly for victims of traffic accidents and other emergency situations.

4 Gliński, P. (2006). *Style działań organizacji pozarządowych w Polsce: Grupy interesu czy pożytku publicznego?* Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN.

5 Salamon, L. M., & Anheier, H. K. (1997). *The emerging nonprofit sector: An overview*. Manchester University Press.

7. Operating educational facilities within the school system to teach medical and rescue skills.
8. Awarding scholarships and prizes to participants supporting the Foundation's goals and organizing free conferences and seminars.
9. Engaging people in Poland and abroad, especially youth and members of creative, intellectual, and scientific communities.
10. Cooperating with governmental and local institutions, healthcare facilities, NGOs, and individuals operating within the Foundation's objectives.
11. Disseminating knowledge via the internet, mass media, radio, television, publications, and reports.
12. Providing financial, organizational, and intellectual support for initiatives promoting achievements in medicine and healthcare.
13. Organizing meetings for experience exchange among individuals and institutions aligned with the Foundation's objectives and providing guidance for those intending to create similar organizations.

The Foundation operates entirely on a non-profit basis. To achieve its goals, it may support activities of other legal entities and individuals whose objectives align with its mission.⁶

Management Board of the Foundation:

- Jerzy Zbigniew Owsiak – President (since July 25, 2001)
- Piotr Leszek Burczyński – Vice President (since March 15, 2013)
- Lidia Niedźwiedzka-Owsiak – Board Member (since July 25, 2001)
- Bohdan Jarosław Maruszewski – Board Member (since October 10, 2016)

WOŚP conducts extensive informational and marketing activities, with the most comprehensive materials available on its websites and social media platforms.

Key websites: polandrockfestival.pl – dedicated to the Pol'and'Rock Festival, Kręcioła TV – video materials, siemashop.pl – online merchandise store, Szadowo-Młyn – professional first aid, survival, and team-building training, integration trips, and motivational workshops, Złoty Melon – 100% owned by WOŚP

⁶ Martela, P. (Ed.), Szelest, E. (Ed.), & Stachera, J. (2011). *Jurek Owsiak: Róbta co chceta, czyli z sercem jak na dłoni – 20 lat grania*. Świat Książki – Grupa Wydawnicza Weltbild.

Social media accounts: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube – WOŚP official pages, Jerzy Owsiak – Facebook, *Domowa Orkiestra* daily program, Pol'and'Rock Festival – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pokojowy Patrol – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Ratujemy i Uczymy Ratować – Facebook, Kręcioła TV – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube

WOŚP builds its funds primarily through public fundraising campaigns, notably the annual *WOŚP Finale*, and other targeted donations. The Foundation reports annually on the allocation of funds collected, ensuring all proceeds from the public campaign are used solely for purchasing medical equipment and financing medical programs. The final amount collected is publicly announced on March 8 each year, along with a report submitted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration.⁷

Hospitals across Poland submit requests for medical equipment, which are then verified through surveys, expert consultations, and needs assessments. Based on this process, the Foundation conducts Offer Competitions to select and purchase the best equipment, followed by contract execution, delivery, installation, and staff training.⁸ After completion, the Foundation submits a detailed financial report to the Ministry, covering expenditures by program and Finale theme.⁹

Each year, approximately 120,000 volunteers participate in around 1,700 WOŚP headquarters. Volunteers have three options for collecting donations: Using traditional collection boxes, Online via eCollection boxes (*eSkarbonka*), Combining both methods.

Impact and Results

Each year, the WOŚP Finale is held under a different theme. The organization's primary goal is to support healthcare in Poland, including equipping hospitals and clinics, as well as creating and managing medical and educational programs.¹⁰ The Foundation provides assistance to pediatric and geriatric departments,

7 Rejestr.io. (n.d.). *KRS – register stránka*. Retrieved from <https://rejestr.io/krs/>

8 Frączak, P., & Izdebski, P. (Eds.). (2014). *Organizacje pozarządowe w Polsce 2014*. Instytut Spraw Publicznych.

9 Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy. (n.d.). *Hlavná stránka* [subdoména s2]. Retrieved from <https://s2.wosp.org.pl/>
Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy. (n.d.). *Oficiálna stránka*. Retrieved from <https://www.wosp.org.pl/>

10 Anheier, H. K. (2014). *Nonprofit organizations: Theory, management, policy* (2nd ed.). Routledge; Sargeant, A., & Shang, J. (2017). *Fundraising principles and practice* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

supplying essential equipment to care units. It also offers first aid courses open to the general public. Volunteers who complete the training receive certification. The WOŚP Foundation consistently ranks among the most trusted public institutions in Poland.

In addition, the WOŚP Foundation organizes one of the largest music festivals in Europe – the Pol'and'Rock Festival (formerly Woodstock).

Nearly 380 pieces of medical equipment will be delivered to more than 60 hospitals across Poland. This is the result of the 56th WOŚP Offer Competition, which consisted of medical equipment purchases carried out over the last two days by Jerzy Owsiak's Foundation. The equipment, valued at over 40 million PLN, was purchased using funds raised during the 28th WOŚP Finale, dedicated to pediatric surgical medicine.

Conclusion

Charitable support for hospitals in Poland plays an invaluable role in building modern and accessible healthcare. Thanks to the engagement of foundations, non-governmental organizations, and local communities, it is possible to fill financial and equipment gaps that are crucial for hospitals in their daily operations, particularly when it comes to saving patients' lives and health. The example of the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity (WOŚP) demonstrates that consistent social initiatives can yield tangible, measurable results—both in large urban centers and in smaller facilities such as the hospital in Myślenice. Medical equipment, modern diagnostic devices, and life-saving apparatus for newborns and adult patients are just some of the benefits generated by charitable engagement.

Support for hospitals is not limited to foundations alone. Financial and in-kind donations from companies and private individuals, volunteering, community campaigns, and collaboration with local governments and other institutions all play a significant role. Every form of assistance—whether financial, material, or personal—contributes to improving working conditions for medical staff, developing healthcare facilities, and enhancing patient comfort. As a result, hospitals are able to provide higher-quality services, respond more swiftly in crisis situations, and save more lives.

Moreover, charitable activities carry a social and educational dimension. By engaging local communities, they foster solidarity, responsibility, and empathy, demonstrating that everyone can make a real contribution to improving the

health and lives of others. Consequently, charitable support becomes not only a practical tool but also a factor that strengthens social bonds and promotes a sense of community.

The analysis of charitable support clearly shows that social responsibility and cooperation form the foundation of Poland's medical development. Thanks to such engagement, hospitals—both large and local—can meet the challenges of modern healthcare, implement innovations in treatment and diagnostics, and provide patients with safety that, in many cases, determines life and health outcomes. Charitable support is therefore an investment not only in medical equipment and procedures but, above all, in human life and health, as well as in building a society based on solidarity and mutual assistance.

Bibliography

- [1] Anheier, H. K. (2014). *Nonprofit organizations: Theory, management, policy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- [2] Doktor, K. (2010). *Organizacje pozarządowe w Polsce*. Difin.
- [3] Frączak, P., & Izdebski, P. (Eds.). (2014). *Organizacje pozarządowe w Polsce 2014*. Instytut Spraw Publicznych.
- [4] Gliński, P. (2006). *Style działań organizacji pozarządowych w Polsce: Grupy interesu czy pożytku publicznego?* Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN.
- [5] Herbst, J. (2005). *Mapa obywatelska: Podstawowe fakty o organizacjach pozarządowych*. Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor.
- [6] Makowski, G. (2008). *Państwo a trzeci sektor: Prawo, instytucje, polityka*. Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN.
- [7] Martela, P. (Ed.), Szelest, E. (Ed.), & Stachera, J. (2011). *Jurek Owsiak: Róbta co chceta, czyli z sercem jak na dłoni – 20 lat grania*. Świat Książki – Grupa Wydawnicza Weltbild.
- [8] Onet. (n.d.). *Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy – sprawodajstvo*. Retrieved from <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/wielka-orkiestra-swiatecznej-pomocy>
- [9] Publicystyka.ngo.pl. (n.d.). *Hlavná stránka*. Retrieved from <https://publicystyka.ngo.pl/>
- [10] Rejestr.io. (n.d.). *KRS – register stránka*. Retrieved from <https://rejestr.io/krs/>
- [11] Salamon, L. M., & Anheier, H. K. (1997). *The emerging nonprofit sector: An*

overview. Manchester University Press.

- [12] Sargeant, A., & Shang, J. (2017). *Fundraising principles and practice* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- [13] Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy. (n.d.). *Hlavná stránka* [subdoména s2]. Retrieved from <https://s2.wosp.org.pl/>
- [14] Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy. (n.d.). *Oficiálna stránka*. Retrieved from <https://www.wosp.org.pl/>