

## **Why sports aerobics has never been transformed into a competitive sports discipline in Poland?: Tracing failure ethnographically**

**Dominika Czarnecka**, Polish Academy of Sciences, ORCID: 0000-0002-6841-9567

### **Abstract**

In the latter half of the 1990s, a former member of the Polish national artistic gymnastics team, Hanna Fidusiewicz, took steps to transform sports aerobics into a national sports discipline. She ultimately failed in her endeavours. To date, Poland still has no national team in sports aerobics. The present article works through the failure ethnographically. Based on the analysis of ethnographic interviews with Hanna Fidusiewicz conducted over twenty years after the events to which they refer, this article aims to demonstrate the complexity of the relations and understandings that contributed to the constitution of failure in the specific context.

**KEYWORDS:** failure, narrative, Poland, sports aerobics, time

### **Introduction**

The word failure is imperfect. Once we begin to transform it, it ceases to be that any longer. The term is always slipping off the edges of our vision, not simply because it's hard to see without wincing, but because once we are ready to talk about it, we often call the event something else – a learning experience, a trial, a reinvention – no longer the static concept of failure. (Lewis, 2014, p. 18)

My first meeting with Hanna Fidusiewicz, who is nowadays referred to in lifestyle media as “the Polish Jane Fonda” (Bloch, 2021), took place online in December 2020. During the Covid-19 pandemic, my ongoing ethnographic research project, focused on women's fitness in Poland, unexpectedly had to be shifted to the online space. Having examined

the online activity of the woman who had become a forerunner of the aerobics revolution in its Polish version (Czarnecka, 2023), one day I wrote to Hanna requesting an ethnographic interview, without harbouring much hope for a positive response. To my surprise, the former fitness instructor replied to my message swiftly and amicably. Due to the pandemic-induced restrictions enforced in Poland at the time, our first conversation was conducted over the online platform Messenger. I never would have suspected that the meeting was to be the first of many, held both online and face-to-face.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the passage of time, the former member of the national team in artistic gymnastics remained active and full of enthusiasm for new projects. Recounting her experiences related to introducing recreational aerobics to Poland in the early 1980s and continuing her work in the fitness industry after the political changes of 1989, Hanna mentioned certain events that took place in July 1998. She related the story of a group of Polish competitors who had taken part in the Sports Aerobics World Championship Tournament in Orlando, USA. Before participating in the international competition, the team had won the Polish Open Championship in Sports Aerobics held in Warsaw several months prior. Hanna stated that the idea for organizing a national Polish competition, as well as for sending the winners to the event in Florida, had come from her and that it was “my (her) success” (Fidusiewicz, December 16, 2020). A little further into the conversation, Hanna unexpectedly declared, “My aim was for (sports) aerobics to emerge, to be a part of the Olympics ... In any case, I tried. It turned out to be too much of a task”. In a subsequent interview, Fidusiewicz admitted: “I was motivated by the desire to have it categorised or classified, and to establish sports aerobics as a separate athletic discipline. Well, this is where I failed to make a mark in the end” (Fidusiewicz, January 5, 2021). In the 1990s, Fidusiewicz’s ambitions were to create a national team in sports aerobics, to transform the discipline into a national sport aligned with the activities of international federations promoting sports aerobics and to take efforts to include the discipline in the program of the Olympic Games. Nevertheless, it was a goal she ultimately failed to achieve.

This article explores the complexity of relations and understandings which can contribute to the constitution of failure in a specific context, by attending to its discursive traces and reverberations. By approaching failure as an ethnographic realm, it aims to challenge the sense of failure as a singular post hoc and demonstrate how different

---

<sup>1</sup> In 2020-2023 I conducted four in-depth interviews with Hanna Fidusiewicz. These were held both face-to-face and online, due to the epidemiological situation at the time. Three interviews, whose fragments were used in the present article, were held with Fidusiewicz on December 16, 2020 and January 5, 2021 – online; December 13, 2023 – face-to-face. Notes are in possession of the author. With her consent, the statements of the instructor are cited using “her” real name.

frames of reference and temporal orders may blend together. In my case study of the failed attempt to transform sports aerobics into a national sport in Poland, I therefore focus neither on the materialization of failure (describing a specific event as a failure), nor on speculating whether failure is a subjective interpretation or an element of a social construct, nor even on analysing whether or not failure could have been avoided in the given case. Providing the wider audience with some information on the history of sports aerobics in Poland in the 1990s, which is a part of the history of a global phenomenon, constitutes this work's added value. With very few exceptions (Brańska, 2002), the extant literature on sports aerobics in Poland is almost exclusively limited to compilations of the rules and requirements of the discipline, methodological remarks and theoretical principles for setting training regimens and workloads. It should be noted that the interviews used in the present article were conducted more than twenty years after the events to which they refer, a fact that is hardly without importance. The stories people tell about their lives are not a perfect reflection of what actually happened, but rather their experiences thereof. Consequently, asking the same questions at different times does not necessarily yield the same answers. Life does not stand still, and narratives and experiences themselves change with its flow. "Stories are true to the flux of experience, and the story affects the direction of that flux" (Frank, 1995, p. 22). We are all "story-telling beings" (Devetak, 2009, p. 795), that perceive, comprehend, remember and communicate through narration; thus, narratives are used as storytelling devices. The etymology of the term "narrative", derived from the Latin *narratio*, suggests that it is a unique type of knowledge that allows us not only to interpret reality by reflecting events, but also to introduce order to our lives by making bridges between the past, the present and the future (Napiórkowski, 2022, p. 34).

The time that has passed between an event and the act of reflecting on it may significantly affect how the experience is remembered and later interpreted and communicated to others. According to David Holmes (1970), the passage of time makes unpleasant experiences decrease in affective intensity more than pleasant experiences, and that experiences which did not decrease in affective intensity between the time they occurred and the time at which they were to be recalled were more likely to be recalled than those which decreased in intensity. The temporal distance may affect the interpretation of failure not only in affective, but also in cultural and social terms. Since failure is rhetoric and narrative, as such "it engages communicative and storytelling devices that influence models of coping with and coming to terms with it" (Mica et al., 2023, p. 10). Formal structures of narrative, which the teller gradually learns and through which rhetorical expectations are reinforced in some ways, may change in time. Moreover, our ability to

be taught new means of narration is limited by the fact that our understanding of storytelling is culturally rooted. Meanwhile, on the discursive level, the definition of what is recognised as failure or success depends on the structural and normative circumstances that set the given situation as a failure or a success. In this sense, the reflection focuses not on failure as a specific event or incident, but rather on how the “rules of the game” regarding success and failure are engaged (Mica et al., 2023, p. 4). The passage of time affects the processes and structures that lead to failure, which may result in changes in perspective or even in the rules of how failure games operate.

In order to accordingly situate the argument presented in this article, first, I provide a review of discussions of failure in anthropology. The first part of the theoretical framework contains an overview of the possible approaches to failure, while the second focuses on presenting the relationship between failure and time. Next, I describe the actions Fidusiewicz undertook in 1990s Poland in order to transform competitive aerobics into a national sport in the context of the global development of the discipline. That section situates the analysed case study in a broader historical context, while also explaining what sports aerobics is, as well as how and when it emerged as an athletic discipline. I then demonstrate and analyse the complexity of relations and understandings that contributed to the constitution of failure in the context in question. To do so, I distinguish three levels of reference: institutional, organisational and personal. Finally, I present my concluding remarks.

### **Complexities of failure**

Failure as a social construct is an abstract category that does not exist in nature (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). There is no universal ahistorical definition of failure, and the understanding of what constitutes failure is in each case dependent on the varied contexts in which meanings, values, and ideal models are created, negotiated and developed by a wide range of social actors.

The available literature on failure is impressive, both with regard to typology and the variety of case studies. According to Catherine Alexander (2023), anthropological engagements with failure fall within one of three principal approaches. In the first one, failure is conceptualised as a certain end point. Central to this approach is the recognition that even beyond the endpoints of some failures there still is something which persists and continues, in the form of tangible damage to places or individuals, feelings (such as disappointment or desire for a better future), material objects, or newly emerged mindsets (e.g. Geissler 2023).

The second approach involves challenging the notion of “failure” understood as a certain normative critical judgment usually based on criteria that arise from specific contexts or value regimes whose relevance in other contexts is limited at best (Appadurai, 2016; Mica et al., 2023). This approach is associated with questions of recognition that stem from different policies of classification. Within the queer (Halberstam, 2011) or critical disability theory (Goodley et al., 2019), the dominant assessment of failure or success is disregarded, or dismissed as irrelevant or violent. Within this framework, the emphasis on the possibility to live life differently is linked to defining failure as nonconformity. Judith/Jack Halberstam’s (2011) work on queer theory offers a somewhat inverted view of (social) failure, containing the claim that failing to meet the expectations of normative society provides one with an opportunity to find satisfaction and personal success elsewhere. In this case, failure is defined as a means to subvert the (hetero)normative hegemonic society. Halberstam (2011, p. 187) encourages others to reveal and persist in their failures, or even try to fail better. The paradox that becomes apparent in this context may be explained with the following question: “If you want to fail, is it failure if it is achieved?” (Carroll et al., 2017, p. 9). As Timothy Carroll, David Jeevendrampillai and Aaron Parkhurst rightfully observe, failure so defined may be accepted (and thus productive) only within very specific conventions or norms. In a broader social context “the particular frame of the productive acceptance of the fact is invented as ‘alterity’, not ‘failure’, in an analytical sense” (Carroll et al., 2017, p. 9). Developing alternative regimes of failure involves processes of re-imagination, redefinition and re-evaluation of failure, which in turn means drawing up new “rules of the game”. Interventions developed through the study of technology, scientific experiments or the history of science, which question the normalisation of failure in science and technology (Appadurai & Alexander, 2019; Haraway, 1994), may also be categorised as following this second approach. A similar view is expressed in performance, dance and martial art studies that present how the new logic of failing may be introduced by learning new somatic and body perceptions, and how this may affect the way we live and navigate the world (Albright 2019, 2023).

The third approach, which the case study described below is in line with, regards failure as an ethnographic domain that has social and material consequences. The collective work edited by Carroll, Jeevendrampillai and Parkhurst (2017) which explores materiality and what happens after the collapse of one material/social system and before the emergence of another, suggests that failure is “a moment of breakage between the reality of the present and the anticipated future ... this breakage carries moral gravity as what ought to have happened, what should be the case, has not come to pass” (Carroll et al.,

2017, p. 2). Ethnographically speaking, failure (which is always relational) may be experienced as a discrepancy between what one wants or expects to be the result of one's actions, and what actually transpires. Since failure may be immensely productive, it need not always be associated with something bad. It often motivates social actors to undertake more attempts in a similar or different fashion, but with more effort and determination (Sundwall, 2017). According to interlocutors interviewed in the field, failures may be charged as morally "positive", "negative", or otherwise. While, as an analytical category, failure is not rooted in any moral assumptions, as an ethnographic category it is a moral accusation (we tend to blame other people or things for our failures, and may even depreciate someone or something in the process). It should also be noted that, seen from this perspective, failure may not necessarily be the antithesis of success. The choice to stay within this binary opposition is determined solely by interlocutors encountered in the field. They often refer to the opposition of failure/success while reminiscing and making comparisons with other options, yet such juxtapositions frequently involve different scales and frames of reference.

The issues of differing scales, criticism of the failure/success binary, and the Silicon Valley and Wall Street practices of intentional redistribution of financial and technological failures onto customers are discussed in *Failure* by Arjun Appadurai and Neta Alexander (2019). In advanced capitalism failure is often regarded as the result of individual choices and actions (the individualisation of failure) rather than as stemming from various contexts (cultural, social, economic, legal, etc.) in which it is embedded. According to Appadurai and Alexander, the failure of tech and financial products is not, in any way, the fault of the people who use them. Appadurai and Alexander identify failure as an inherent element of the capitalist economic structure, in which the top 1% of the population wins at the expense of the remaining 99% (see also Appadurai, 2015; Mica et al., 2023). In many cases, "the contemporary success story of failure" (Mica et al., 2023, p. 3) - the so-called successful failures presented as an implicit, inexorable part of the "game", and devised and redefined as an element of the process of knowledge production or policymaking - are, in fact developed at the cost of introducing new inequalities and asymmetries (Appadurai & Alexander, 2019; Sassen, 2016). Some research works, including those from the field of anthropology of religion (Hüsken, 2007), uncover the generative and transformative potential of failure. In research on sports failure is often analysed in relation to fear, e.g. with a focus on the consequences that fear of failure may have for the process of motivating athletes and for athlete burnout (Conroy & Elliot, 2004; Gustafsson et al., 2023). Relevant literature also contains discussion on the consequences of failure in sports (Harris & Eitzen, 1978), the influence of engaging in sports on failures in

general life (Butt et al., 2020), and conceptualisations of failure and the consequences thereof in specific occupational worlds, e.g. in ice hockey (Gallmeier, 1989).

### **Failure and time**

Failures occur so commonly that most of them are ignored or brushed aside in daily life. The fact that failure is treated as non-existent (an element of the past) shows that failure is inextricably linked to the temporal aspect. If certain things work out or behave according to social actors' expectations, it is because they are similar to situations and behaviours these individuals had experienced in the past. Past experiences are projected onto the present, with the expectation that identical or similar results will occur in the future. However, if certain things behave or develop in an unexpected way, social actors usually experience abrupt surprise in the present, and begin to wonder what a given individual/thing may have done wrong in the past. In this context, the accusation of failure defines a situation or thing that had not gone as expected, and failure refers to the past. Past failures signify a set of different potentialities that were lost or abandoned along the way, i.e. unachieved present or future realities that might have been. Such emphasis on the future may often be observed in contemporary research problematising failure. As a matter of the future, failure is not what transpired, but rather what could have panned out differently within projections made retrospectively in relation to unexpected events which are then presented as something that could have been expected. The perception of failure as future is apparent in literature on public policy failures (Capano & Woo, 2017); increasingly often, the growing level of instability and unmanageability cause the analytical discussion to shift towards the imaginaries of failure, not failure as such.

Carroll et al. (2017) further emphasise that the relationship between failure and time is connected to the issue of maturation. That which has matured in a natural fashion has not failed. Failure, meanwhile, is premature by nature. In this context, failure may be associated, among other things, with being denied the prospects of development and maturation (e.g. those identities that do not conform to the dominant social expectations).

### **Global/local entanglements**

#### ***Sports aerobics in the making***

Literature presents the three decisive phases of globalisation of modern gym and fitness culture as essential to the process of the global transformation and the massive expansion of the fitness industry, observable since the 1970s (Andreasson & Johansson, 2014a).

The second phase, which constitutes the broad context for the events described in the present work, began in 1946, when Joseph “Joe” Weider and his brother Ben established the International Federation of Bodybuilding and Fitness (IFBB). During this second stage of the globalisation of fitness culture, which lasted until the 1990s, the links between bodybuilding and the specific form of exercise called workout/aerobics gradually grew stronger, leading to not only men but also women becoming increasingly involved in the movement. The aerobics revolution that took place in the 1980s resulted in the male-centred gym subculture being supplanted with mass participation in fitness (Andreasson & Johansson, 2014b).

The 1980s was also when recreational high-impact aerobics in the USA gave rise to sports aerobics - a combination of gymnastics, sports acrobatics and dance. It combined movements and steps characteristic for aerobics with high-difficulty coordination exercises and complex choreography, creating original, technically perfect routines set to music (Ambroży & Dudek, 2010). The first American federation for sports aerobics, the National Aerobic Championship (NAC), was set up in 1983 by Robert Anderson, who was among the pioneers of the discipline. That same year, Karen and Howard Schwartz organized the first US Championship in Sports Aerobics in Palo Alto, held under the auspices of the NAC. The first World Aerobics Championship took place in 1990 in San Diego (Iknoian & Reimer, 1991). The tournament involved 120 participants from eighteen countries and was broadcast in sixty countries across the world. The growing popularity the gymnastics discipline enjoyed at the time is apparent from the fact that only two years later the World Championship featured participants from thirty three countries and was broadcast to 150 countries, including Poland (Brańska, 2002). The number of international federations for sports aerobics athletes also began to increase in the 1990s, affiliating national federations from around the world. In 1993 the institutions partnered with the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (the International Gymnastics Federation) (FIG) applied to the FIG Executive Committee to have sports aerobics included into the FIG competition program. In March 1995, the first training course for coaches and referees of sports aerobics was conducted in Switzerland; the first Aerobic World Championship was organised in December 1995 in Paris (FIG, 2024). Nowadays, the most active federations with the most reach include the FIG, the Federation of International Sport Aerobics and Fitness (FISAF), the Association of National Aerobic Champions (ANAC), the International Aerobic Federation (IAF) (Skotnicka, 2023). The aim of these institutions has been not only to promote and develop the sport, but also to make it a part of the Olympic Games. The information that sports aerobics would be included as a demonstration sport during the Games of the XXVII Olympiad hosted in



Sydney in the year 2000 began to appear in the Polish media in the latter half of the 1990s (Aerobik, 1997). Ultimately, however, none of these promises were fulfilled; thus far, sports aerobics has not been featured in the Olympic Games.

### ***Sports aerobics in Poland and the role of Hanna Fidusiewicz***

Sports aerobics in Poland began to develop in the early 1990s, with the prominent involvement of academic circles. The first Academic Wrocław Championship in the discipline was held in 1993; the first Polish Championship Tournament for Higher Education Institutions was organized in 1996, but included only one category, namely trio performances (Jeziński, 1999). Individual competitions were added to the roster in 1999, pair competitions - in 2001. From 2019 onwards, the Academic Polish Championship has also included the category of fitness teams. Since the first competition, the Academic Championship has been organized in accordance with FISAF rules (Skotnicka, 2023).

Aside from the initiatives undertaken by academic circles, the development of sports aerobics in Poland in the 1990s was also facilitated by Hanna Fidusiewicz. Owing to her passion and perseverance, by the 1990s Fidusiewicz was already well-established in the fitness industry and had developed a broad network of connections. A graduate of University of Physical Education in Warsaw and a former gymnastic contestant, Fidusiewicz valued the competitive aspects of sports. Aware of the favourable trends in the global development of sports aerobics, she decided to take on a new challenge.

Since I used to do competitive sports myself, I knew about sports competitions and how success in sports feels like. And I thought to myself ... I felt that it would be prestigious to establish an organisation (for sports aerobics). ... That if I organised such a contest, because it wouldn't be me participating, only these youngsters, then it would attract them a little bit as a sport. Just like skateboarding is an Olympic discipline today, who would have thought? So that's how I saw it, so far ahead. (Fidusiewicz, December 13, 2023)

Fidusiewicz's aim was to awaken interest in sports aerobics in Poland, to take it to a higher level, and to create both a national association for sports aerobics and the future national team that would be professionally trained to compete in international events, including the Olympic Games.

In October 1997, the Fitness Poland National Association for the Fitness Movement in Poland (established in 1996) organised the first training course for aerobics instructors open to applicants from across the country (Aerobik, 1997). The idea came from the pres-

ident of the Association Lidia Staniewska and the vice-president Hanna Fidusiewicz. The three-day classes, held in Warsaw, were taught by the director of Fitness Wales Mary Sheppard. While the principal aim of organising the course was to popularise the general idea of physical recreation and to standardise training courses for fitness instructors (so that all aerobics classes in Poland would be conducted in a similar fashion, on the basis of specially prepared programs), plans for the further development of sports aerobics as a national discipline were already being made. Since recreational aerobics was immensely popular in 1990s Poland, finding people willing to participate in competitions proved comparatively easy. It was recreational aerobics that was to provide the platform for identifying individuals with the most talent, who could then be trained at a competitive level by coaches with the right qualifications.

The organisation of the first Polish Open Championship in Sports Aerobics proved an important step towards achieving the objective set by Fidusiewicz. The event took place on May 16, 1998, in the no longer extant Grand Hotel in Warsaw. The championships were held in the following categories: individual (men/women), mixed pairs and trios (Chris, 1998). As the president of the Fitness Poland Association, Fidusiewicz was able to secure financial support from the Office of Physical Culture and Tourism (UKFiT), which also extended official patronage over the event, thereby granting it sufficiently high status.<sup>2</sup> According to Fidusiewicz, the support of the UKFiT proved crucial for the success of the venture:

They liked it very much, my entire organisation, at the Office of Physical Culture and Tourism. Such support is very (important), because such institutions, this was my first time cooperating with them, they have certain options, certain reach. ... So this gave me a lot of financial support. That was nice, and it really should have gone further (laughs). So yeah. (Fidusiewicz, December 13, 2023)

The competition performances, evaluated by an all-female panel of judges (who scored them on the artistic value, execution and difficulty level), attracted a large audience and complied with the FIG regulations. In the 1990s, Poland did not belong to any international sports aerobics federations (it only became an official member of the FISAF in 2013) (Ciepielowska, 2021). It should be noted that each international association for sports aerobics had its own set of regulations, different from the others. The choice of the regulations to be applied during the Polish Open Championship in Sports Aerobics was therefore a matter of some importance, and even posed some challenges for the organis-

---

<sup>2</sup>The UKFiT was a state administration institution operating between 1991–2000, and concerned with promoting sports, physical education and physical culture

ers. Ultimately, the championship in Warsaw was held in accordance with the FIG regulations; however, as Fidusiewicz conceded, in practice some rules were averaged out:

They (the associations) have their own regulations. This also posed some difficulties in the organisation of the contest, because the FIG had a different set of rules altogether. In fact, these organisations contended with one another, to be the one admitted to the International Olympic Committee. ... Later, as we were doing the contest in Warsaw, which I organised, we averaged these rules out a little bit, because the important thing was for the judges to be prepared for how they should be scoring, for all this to come into being. Not to argue over one set of rules or another. ... I was the organiser, so I made these decisions. (Interview with Fidusiewicz, December 13, 2023)

Fidusiewicz's choice of regulations to be used during the first Polish Open Championship in Sports Aerobics was rooted in her future plans associated with sending athletes to international competitions, including the Olympic Games.

The organisers ensured that the event would receive adequate coverage in the media, including television. According to Fidusiewicz, the competition received quite a lot of publicity and was considered a general success. On May 19, 1998, the Polish sports daily *Przełąd Sportowy* reported:

Moreover, we hope and wish for the best to continue to improve, to be able to compete in August at the World Championship tournament in Florida, to be able to offer a ... demonstrative demonstration at the 2000 Sydney Olympics (they are already familiar with the flooring, as the exact same type was brought in for the Warsaw championship), and finally, to be serious contenders for medals in the 2004 Olympic Games. Wishful thinking? Possibly. For now, the president, Hanna Fidusiewicz, has solemnly promised the gathered crowd that they would all meet again next year, during the second Polish Championship in sports aerobics. (Chris, 1998)

Soon after the successful launch of the Polish Championship, Fidusiewicz made another request for the financial support of the UKFiT. This time it was to cover the travelling expenses for the 6 Polish contestants to be sent to Orlando in Florida, where the World Championship in sports aerobics would be held in July 1998. Once again, Fidusiewicz received funding, which covered nearly the entire cost of organising the trip to the USA. Once in America, Fidusiewicz had the opportunity to observe how sports aerobics competitions were organised on a global scale – information that she intended to put to fu-

ture use. Although the Polish contestants did not win any prizes in Orlando, to Hanna victory was less important than simply taking the next step, motivating her contestants to become more involved in the sporting rivalry, and giving them the chance to prove their skills on an international level. As she explained during our interview:

I could see that mistakes were being made, that one thing or another did not conform to regulations, but I believed that, at that point in time, these things weren't all that important. ... During the competition, I could see that they weren't aware of some things. It wasn't that they couldn't do them, they just didn't have the sense to, or didn't know. There was no regular training to prepare for the contests back then. We hadn't yet got to that stage. I truly wanted to create something of that sort, but it just didn't work out. ... I thought things would go further, but they didn't. (Fidusiewicz, December 13, 2023)

According to Fidusiewicz, the entire Polish team was satisfied with their trip to Orlando. Although the initial prospects were promising, not long after her return from the United States, Fidusiewicz returned to the fitness industry and gained recognition as an organiser of training courses for recreational aerobics instructors. She never organised the second Polish Championship in Sports Aerobics. The contestants, coming from different regions of Poland, also went on to do other things. In practice, the development of sports aerobics in Poland was once again limited to the academic sphere.

In July 2017 Wrocław (south-western Poland) hosted the X World Games - a major international multi-sport event, meant for sports or disciplines within a sport not contested in the Olympic Games. The principal aim of the World Games is to promote these disciplines so that they could one day become Olympic sports. Sports aerobics was among the 27 official disciplines included in the program of the X World Games. The competition, held on July 21-22, 2017, (in accordance with FIG regulations), involved participants from 116 countries. Although Poland was the host country, it was not represented at the contest, since no national team in sports aerobics existed (Moch, 2017).

### ***In search of the logic of failure***

As I was transcribing the interviews recorded using a dictation machine, trying to identify what Hanna wanted to convey in her stories, what mattered to her, what she was worried about or counting on, and what could explain her thoughts, behaviour and actions, I took note of how the cracks in her narrative allowed one category to smoothly blend into the other. Hanna's tale of what she had not managed to achieve, told many years after the events described, was interwoven with an account of her successes asso-

ciated with organising the Polish Open Championship in Sports Aerobics in Warsaw and sending a group of contestants to the Sports Aerobics World Championship Tournament in Orlando. Hanna talked about her successes at length, in detail and with great enthusiasm. She was much more reserved in her accounts of what she had failed to achieve. After one of the interviews, I began to wonder whether Hanna would have been able or willing to talk about the things in which she had “failed to make a mark” if the interview had been conducted several years prior (closer to the events described) - at a point when it would not yet have been possible for her to know how her career would develop - and, if so, what such an interview may have comprised. My interlocutor’s narrative contained many levels of reference, which are interesting not only due to the role they play in the process of (re)interpreting past events, but also on account of the present relationships and meanings constituting failure reflected in them. The levels of reference presented below were selected for analytical purposes only. They are not mutually exclusive, but may complement one another, redirecting attention to the complexity of the relationships and meanings constituting failure. In Hanna Fidusiewicz’s narrative, they intertwined.

### ***Lessons from institutions (the institutional level)***

The global circumstances in the latter half of the 1990s were favourable for the development of sports aerobics. Its popularity was on the rise, both in terms of the number of athletes interested in competing at different levels, and with regard to the potential audience. International federations of the sport were cropping up around the world, and undertaking serious action to popularise the new discipline everywhere. The federations were also keenly interested in having sports aerobics included in the program of the 2000 Olympic Games, and adding it as a fully-fledged Olympic discipline in 2004. Although these organisations did compete against one another, it was their actions that testified to the potential of sports aerobics, effectively legitimising the local social actors’ efforts to promote and develop it on a national scale. As Hanna Fidusiewicz stated in our interviews, the activities of international organisations helped convince her that the initiatives she undertook in Poland had meaning and potential.

Apart from international bodies that set the broad framework for Fidusiewicz’s future work, two Polish institutions played an important role in her narrative: 1) the Office of Physical Culture and Tourism, and 2) the Polish Gymnastics Association (PZG). Fidusiewicz had no financial backing of her own. In order to implement her plans regarding sports aerobics, she needed to acquire additional funding. The organisation of

the first Polish Open Championship in Warsaw, as well as sending a team of Polish athletes to the World Championship in Orlando, was only possible thanks to the financial support of the UKFiT. Acquiring the funding necessary to make both initiatives possible was interpreted by Hanna as a personal success - "it was my achievement to organise the money; I got state funding from the Office of Physical Culture (the UKFiT)" (Fidusiewicz, December 16, 2020). However, this was only short-term financing, intended to aid in the completion of specific predetermined goals. The further development of sports aerobics as a national discipline required much greater sums and, most of all, financial commitments that would be stable and long-lasting. Ultimately in 1999 the management of the UKFiT changed, causing Fidusiewicz to lose all her contacts there, along with the financial support of the organisation. Another institution from which Fidusiewicz tried to acquire financial support before the World Championship in Sports Aerobics in Orlando, was the Polish Gymnastics Association, operating since 1947. Her request was denied. The PZG was (and still is) a part of the Polish Olympics Committee (PKOL) and the International Gymnastics Federation, which in turn belonged to the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Since Fidusiewicz harboured ambitious plans and aspirations associated with creating a future Olympic team in sports aerobics, establishing a rapport with and obtaining funds from the PZG was extremely important for her future prospects in the field. The former gymnast believed the support of the PZG was crucial for sports aerobics to gain official recognition in Poland, to elevate it (and all endeavours associated with it) to the right status to ensure consistent development in the years to come. The PZG had the organisational structure, training facilities and financial resources necessary to ensure the systematic development and promotion of athletes involved in sports aerobics. According to Fidusiewicz, the first factor that contributed to her failing to secure the support of the PZG was money. The PZG was obliged to divide the available pool of resources between the disciplines officially integrated into its structures. Including sports aerobics, which was not an Olympic discipline, would require the Association to allocate the same funds to a larger number of gymnastic disciplines. The second factor mentioned by Fidusiewicz was the lack of properly functioning lower-level institutional structures, such as sports clubs, which could gradually elevate the standing of sports aerobics and pave the way for it to become a new discipline within the PZG.

Asked about the reasons for failing to achieve the intended goal of transforming sports aerobics into a national discipline, Hanna replied:

I think, well, I don't know; maybe it was the order. The lack of interest from the Polish Gymnastics Association ... I know that gymnastics associations have the obligation to support their discipline somehow; because there was no such club, right, then perhaps it should have gone like this: first a club, operating as an association, then the club becomes a member of the Polish Gymnastics Association and gets some support. Clubs also need to get some support as institutions. So I guess it proved too much for me! To organise everything to that degree. I think the whole organisation thing was too much for me, the lack of support from the (Polish) Gymnastics Association, and that was it. (Fidusiewicz, December 13, 2023)

Confronted with rejection and, as she put it "not getting any kind of approval from them (the PZG)" (Fidusiewicz, December 13, 2023), she did not make further efforts in that direction.

In a narrative constructed with the benefit of hindsight, Hanna openly admitted - being aware of it - that the institutional level had proved too overwhelming and that she had not been able to create a suitable lower-level institution, such as a sports club to lobby for the development of sports aerobics. However, from an analytical perspective touching on the relationships and meanings that constitute failure in the given context, what deserves attention are the socio-cultural mechanisms operating indirectly and reflected in the supposition that "perhaps it should have gone like this". On the one hand this reveals neo-liberal normalising tendencies. On the other, the punishing norms that discipline individual behaviour. Hanna's admittance that the order of steps taken within institutional structures should have been different - a procedure which she had, in a sense, disturbed - not only testifies to her individual internalisation of systemic norms, but also illustrates the tendency (generated within the neo-liberal model) to shift responsibility for failure to the individual, if the dominant - and thus reflected in the existing power relations—norms are "infringed" upon. The regime of failure emerging from Fidusiewicz's statements is based on making the individual assume that whatever they failed at (the lost potentiality) could have been achieved had they followed the rules of the system. Within that framework, failure acts as a means to discipline an individual, which ultimately leads to limiting their possibilities and controlling their actions.

### ***The problem of value differences (the organisational level)***

Fidusiewicz's efforts towards developing sports aerobics in Poland required the involvement and cooperation of many social actors. As the president of the Fitness Poland Association, Fidusiewicz had some organisational support and a group of collaborators with whom she could pursue new initiatives. In practice, however, at least from her own perspective, the cooperation within the Association was neither satisfactory nor sufficient for the undertakings they were engaged in at the time, for a number of reasons. On the one hand, members of the Association came from all around Poland, which made coordinating any kind of joint ventures relatively challenging. On the other hand, the majority of fitness instructors in the Association were young people, focused primarily on self-development. In one of our interviews Hanna explained:

Everyone wanted to do it individually, to invest in themselves, and not in the Association. These were young people, and I could understand them, especially in Poland, when we were still learning from the West, so every instructor wanted to go to a conference abroad, to get as much knowledge and practical skill as possible, because this meant more clients for them, this was their livelihood. Meanwhile, the Association was an organisation that did not promote them as much yet. (Fidusiewicz, December 13, 2023)

If I had had more support, I would have gone further, but I didn't feel up to it, to go it alone. In general, I was older than all these people who were just starting to train aerobics, because I had started relatively late, as a 30-year-old. Nowadays people start their journey at 20, so they are at a different stage with their thinking. So because I was at that stage, I was thinking about organising some institution, some undertaking, so to speak. Meanwhile they were at the stage of developing their own image, and I can understand that, I really can ... I mean, they just expected that someone would organise everything and they would maybe join in. ... They were waiting for me to do something. But this was a little too little (laughs), and too much for me. So yeah, I simply stopped organising things. (Fidusiewicz, December 13, 2023)

Despite being able to rely on a few close associates who helped her complete some of the tasks, in practice Fidusiewicz felt burdened with the duties and responsibilities associated with running the Association. To make matters worse, she did not believe that the organisation could provide sufficient support for her in terms of future initiatives and the development of activities on a wider scale. Although Hanna has repeatedly emphasised that she did not blame anyone for failing to achieve her ultimate goal, she also made



many references to the negative impact of other people's lack of involvement in the venture. She stated that while she herself was focused on joint efforts to complete long-term, multi-dimensional objectives, the young contestants/instructors were mostly interested in individual development. She believed that the differences in this respect were apparent in personal values.

Personal values are values of individuals which may be defined as the "broad desirable goals that motivate people's action and serve as guiding principles in their lives" (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022, p. 518). Personal values should not be confused with character features: the former specify what people aspire to, whereas the latter indicate what people are like. Differences in personal values are one of the key aspects of constituting failure which emerged in the process of analysing the organisational frame of reference.

Achievement values (a type of personal values) are commonly accepted in the occupational world of aerobic/fitness instructors/contestants, whose members aspire to succeed. Everything Fidusiewicz said about her professional career and her experiences associated with sports aerobics indicates that achievement values have always been important to her. However, achievement values may (at least to some extent) inform motivations that are expressed in the form of rivalry - it is the framework within which individuals are geared towards achieving self-enhancement goals. Rivalry is the antithesis of cooperation, which "is compatible with self-transcendence values that express the motivation to benefit other" (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022, p. 534). The relation between self-enhancement values and self-transcendence values is therefore one of conflict. Meanwhile, the ability to work as a team - i.e. cooperate - is a key component that may help people achieve their goals (if it exists), or prevent them from reaching successful outcomes (if it is absent). Consequently, value differences may significantly contribute to the failure of the entire venture.

Given the above considerations, the way Fidusiewicz constructed her narrative is noteworthy, especially in terms of the characterisation of the main protagonists of the story, which is among the 3 constitutive elements of narratives, alongside the setting and the plotment (Oppermann & Spencer, 2023). The characterisation consists in imbuing the main protagonists of the story with specific qualities which then provide the audience with certain hints/suggestions regarding their motivations and intentions. First of all, Fidusiewicz presented herself in her own narrative as mature, experienced, and focused on joint efforts to complete long-term, multi-dimensional objectives (with her motivation grounded in self-transcendence values), while portraying most fitness instructors/contestants in the Association as young, inexperienced, and interested mostly in indi-

vidual development and investing in themselves (their motivation rooted in self-enhancement values). Secondly, Fidusiewicz's narrative contained not only a characterisation of the main protagonists, but also something of a contestation of that portrayal - emphasising the age gap and the resultant differences in thinking and experience, as well as the lack of sufficient promotion by the Association - allowing the audience hearing the story to judge the qualities of the main protagonists, and thus to compare and morally evaluate their intentions and motives. Hanna's narrative presented a conflict between her personal values and the values of the people within the environment in which she had been operating at the time. Meanwhile, the issue of the potential incongruence of her own personal values, which may even have been a value conflict (achievement values vs. self-transcendence values), was entirely absent from her narrative.

### ***Mind games (the personal level)***

When summing up the events that took place over 20 years prior, Fidusiewicz stated:

I also learned to work a little bit differently. In the sense that spontaneity and emotions alone are not enough. That to organise an undertaking one needs to make sufficient preparations and make an analysis of the good and bad ... and only then make the decision. Obviously, not to overthink either, because if we start doing that, the drawbacks will always appear to be numerous. ... I believe that venture of mine was a very emotional one, back then, but I don't regret it, because I did manage to achieve a thing or two, and today I actually have more problems with decision-making, maybe because I am more aware than I was then (laughs). Back then it was all very emotional; I had some contacts, got some funding here or there, so I thought that maybe we'd go further, but it turned out to be too little, and I realised it would all become my responsibility, and that before, I didn't know if it was even possible to acquire, so before I could acquire some collaborators and other resources that were needed, it would all take a very long time, and I had no more drive or energy. (Fidusiewicz, December 13, 2023)

Later in the interview, Fidusiewicz added that if she had known the things she does today and had been familiar with the mechanisms she had not been aware of back then, she would probably have been able to "shoulder" the enterprise and steer it further.

Constructed with the benefit of hindsight, Hanna's narrative reflects a change in her perception, associated with ways of understanding the world and functioning within it,

and stemming from her having recognised failure as an opportunity to learn and grow. In this case, the learning process is interpreted as “a change of beliefs ... as a result of the observation and interpretation of experience” (Levy, 1994, p. 283), in which experience plays the leading role. Discrediting old ways of doing things to seek and “discover” new ones that might help prevent future failures is a part of the process of learning from failure. As her statements indicate, in time Fidusiewicz started to perceive the experience of failure as a source of learning, which consequently allowed her to form, at least partially, positive associations with the experience, ultimately leading to her empowerment.

In another part of the interview, Hanna admitted that she had felt alone in her struggle, had no energy to continue working and that she eventually gave up because at some point she saw other opportunities for herself:

Perhaps it was my subconscious telling me there were many unknowns, many obstacles that would weigh heavy on me, and I didn't want to end up failing. So I believed that this could be perceived as a tiny success (laughs) that I had organised such and such contests, that I had managed it, not as a failure in that I had not managed to organise it further. ... I wanted to avoid it not because I was afraid, but because at that point I was already aware that I would need much help, which would be difficult to acquire. ... I believe I had exerted some efforts, considerable efforts, to organise all of that, because if I hadn't done that, nobody would have. That's the truth. I was engrossed in it. Engrossed in it, first as form of recreation, and then as a sport, in which I saw further potential, but maybe it proved too hard for me. (Fidusiewicz, December 13, 2023)

I felt that I was in over my head a bit, so I didn't want to keep fighting for it. I simply saw other opportunities for myself; this is why I quit. Even though the Polish championship that I organised truly was a success. (Fidusiewicz, December 13, 2023)

The above statements reveal two issues important for the present analysis: 1) the privilege of failure, and 2) operating within the confines of the binary opposition of failure/success.

When embarking on the ambitious quest to transform sports aerobics into a national discipline in Poland, and undertaking activities that carried the risk of failure, Hanna was an experienced individual, recognisable in the fitness industry. She also had an active network of contacts in her professional environment. Fidusiewicz was in the group of social actors who had the opportunity to fulfil their potential, develop, and engage

with purposive actions even with the risk of failing - the privilege of failure (Appadurai & Alexander, 2019; Mica et al., 2023). When taking the decision to discontinue her endeavours towards the development of sports aerobics, Fidusiewicz judged the probability of the efforts ending in eventual success to be slim. The inability to complete the intended goals in the context of sports aerobics, and the subsequent abandonment of the venture did not spell the end of Fidusiewicz's professional career. At a later stage, the former gymnast began to consolidate her position in the field of commercial fitness, successfully cooperating with well-known brands such as Nike and Reebok. She did not disappear from the public sphere of media and sports.

In stating that "she did not want to end up failing" (Fidusiewicz, December 13, 2023), Fidusiewicz changes the frame of reference somewhat, since she what she means is not (or not only) her efforts towards transforming sports aerobics into a national discipline, but her potential professional career if she had carried on with her endeavours. That utterance indicates that Fidusiewicz considers failure to be tied to moral assumptions and linked to moral accusations (Carroll et al., 2017). She sees failure as something negative, which she herself "did not want to end up" doing, as well as the antithesis of a positively valued success towards which she was geared. Her staying within the binary opposition of failure/success leads not only to fear of her past actions being defined in terms of a fiasco, but also to her present expectation/desire for efforts which she defines as her personal success (i.e. organising the Polish Open Championship in Sports Aerobics in Warsaw and sending a group of contestants to the Sports Aerobics World Championship Tournament in Orlando) to be remembered as such - a desired future potentiality. The paradox lies in the fact that failure to achieve the ultimate goal, which for Fidusiewicz was to turn sports aerobics into a national sport, is intricately interwoven with minor successes.

## **Conclusion**

This work employs the example of Hanna Fidusiewicz's unrealised venture of turning sports aerobics into a national discipline in 1990s Poland, with its own national team, to discuss the complexity of relations and understandings that contribute to the constitution of failure in this specific context. The analysis of several ethnographic interviews conducted with Fidusiewicz more than twenty years after the events to which they referred me to distinguish three levels of reference: institutional, organisational, and personal, within which the complexity and contingency of failure were presented. Each of these levels was then scrutinised to identify the plexus of relations, understandings and tem-

poral orders which intermingled and complemented one another, contributing to the final outcome of sports aerobics never becoming a national sports discipline in Poland.

Failure is an elusive phenomenon. The chosen case study demonstrates that the sense of failure does not arise because of any single individual, but is the result of complex processes involving many bodies, forces and circumstances, many of which are beyond the control of the individual. The third approach to failure presented in the section *Complexities of failure* specifies that failure may be experienced as a discrepancy between what one wants or expects to be the result of one's actions, and what actually transpires. In the context of this analysis, the elusiveness of failure should be understood through the lens of control: it is reflected in the workings of forces beyond the control of the agent. Predictability is associated with the possibility of exercising control, whereas contingency, which is at the other end of the spectrum, entails the loss of control. The irregularities and interfering parts of the "world" presented in Fidusiewicz's narrative, which the former gymnast was unable to manage or stabilise in the past, are indicative of a sense of having lost control, intrinsic to the experience of failure.

Failure is an indispensable part of the learning process, yet under capitalism - in which failure is harshly criticised, while success is regarded as a core value—individuals may come to perceive failure as both unsettling and inconvenient. The individualisation of failure involves the social expectation of re-establishing control of oneself, should one ever lose it. Fidusiewicz's decision to focus on the development of the recreational fitness was, among other things, an attempt to regain control over the situation. Although Hanna gave up on sports aerobics, the experience of failing to achieve the set objective has informed her later decisions. The experience proved productive, in the sense that it motivated Fidusiewicz to reflect and make a conscious effort to focus her energy and invest time and resources into self-development within recreational aerobics. The positive impact of having experienced failure in sports aerobics manifested in the form of a change in Hanna's modus operandi and decision-making (as a part of the learning process), ultimately leading to her empowerment and achieving professional success and personal satisfaction in the recreation industry. The experience of failure inspired change (albeit in a different direction than originally intended). As discussed above within three levels of reference, although failure and success are often intricately interwoven, in the context of the mentioned productivity of the experience of failure, this case study does (at least to some extent) fit the model of the so-called successful story of failure, in which failure is redefined as an element of acquiring knowledge and achieving personal growth.

The case study presented herein demonstrates the complexity of relationship between failure and time, not only because the time that has passed between an event and the act of reflecting on it significantly affects how the experience of failure is remembered (Hanna forgot many details, and the threads of her narrative often blurred and mixed together), and thus interpreted and communicated in the present. It is certainly possible that, had it not been for her later success in recreational fitness, Fidusiewicz would not have been able/willing to talk about her failure to develop aerobics as an athletic discipline in Poland. The complexity of the relationship between failure and time is also reflected at the level of the different potentialities that were lost (e.g. becoming the chairperson of a large sports organisation, which Fidusiewicz mentioned during the interview), but could have become future realities had failure not come in their way. Fidusiewicz began her endeavours in sports aerobics with the intention to materialise certain future potentialities, whose realisation was unexpectedly thwarted (things as not being in accord with expectation). The projections made retrospectively in relation to unexpected events were not presented as something that could have been expected. Finally, the issue of maturation, in the analysed case connected to the development of professional identity, becomes yet another layer that reflects the complexity of the relationship between failure and time. At the time of commencing her activities towards developing sports aerobics, Fidusiewicz was not a professional sports manager (and thus lacked a properly developed professional identity, which she only wished to establish at the time). In this context, it is denial of the prospects of development and maturation that may be associated with failure.

### **Acknowledgements**

I extend my gratitude to Hanna Fidusiewicz, without whom this article would never have been written. This work was supported by the National Science Center (NCN) under (grant number UMO-2018/29/B/HS3/01563).

## References

- Aerobik (1997, October 14). *Aerobik zagości na igrzyskach w Sydney* [Aerobics to feature at the Sydney Olympic Games]. *Życie Warszawy* [Life of Warsaw].
- Albright, A. C. (2019). *How to land: Finding ground in an unstable world*. Oxford University Press.
- Alexander, C. (2023). Writing failure: Knowledge production, temporalities, ethics, and traces. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 29(S1), 8–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13899>
- Ambroży, D., & Dudek, D. (2010). *Aerobik sportowy: podstawy szkolenia zawodnika* [Sports aerobics: the basics for training contestants]. European Association for Security.
- Andreasson, J., & Johansson, T. (2014a). The fitness revolution: Historical transformations in the global gym and fitness culture. *Sport Science Review*, 23(3–4), 91–112. <https://doi.org/10.2478/ssr-2014-0006>
- Andreasson, J., & Johansson, T. (2014b). *The global gym: Gender, health and pedagogies*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Appadurai, A. (2015). *Banking on words: The failure of language in the age of derivative finance*. University of Chicago Press.
- Appadurai, A. (Ed.) (2016). Failure. Special Issue. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 83(3): 537-800. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2016.0042>
- Appadurai, A., & Alexander, N. (2019). *Failure*. Polity Press.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in a sociology of knowledge*. Anchor.
- Bloch, N. (2021, April, 21). Ćwiczymy z polską Jane Fonda. Oto trenerka, do której ustawiały się kolejki kobiet [We're exercising with the Polish Jane Fonda. She is a trainer who women used to queue up to]. Dzień dobry TVN [Good Morning TVN]. <https://dziendobry.tvn.pl/zdrowie/sport-i-fitness/hanna-fidusiewicz-nazywana-jest-polska-jane-fonda-kim-jest-trenerka-do-ktorej-ustawialy-sie-kolejki-da337381-5313995>
- Brańska, Ż. (2002). *Aerobic sportowy* [Sports aerobics]. Wydawnictwo Akademii Wychowania Fizycznego im. Józefa Piłsudskiego.
- Butt, M. Z. I., Adnan, M. A. J., & Mughal, Q. (2020). Effect on sport participation on failure in general life: An exploratory study. *The SKY-International Journal of Physical Education and Sports Sciences*, 4(1), 54–64. <https://doi.org/10.51846/the-sky.v4i1.815>
- Capano, G., & Woo, J. J. (2017). Resilience and robustness in policy design: A critical appraisal. *Policy Sciences*, 50(3), 399–426. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-016-9273-x>
- Carroll, T., Jeevendrampillai, D., Parkhurst, A., & Shackelford, J. (Eds.). (2017). *The material culture of failure: When things do wrong*. Bloomsbury. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003087069>

- Carroll, T., Jeevendrampillai, D., & Parkhurst, A. (2017). Introduction: Towards a general theory of failure. In T. Carroll, D. Jeevendrampillai, A. Parkhurst & J. Shackelford (Eds.), *The material culture of failure: When things do wrong* (pp. 1–20). Bloomsbury.
- Chris (1998, May 19). *Tęsknota za “oczkiem” [Yearning for “full marks”]*. Przegląd Sportowy [Sports Overview].
- Ciepielowska, J. (2021). Budowa somatyczna i struktura obciążeń treningowych a kierunek zmian wskaźników określających poziom wytrenowania polskich zawodniczek i zawodników aerobiku sportowego [The somatic structure and make-up of training load versus value changes in indicators determining the level of training of Polish contestants in sports aerobics] [Doctoral dissertation, Krakow University of Physical Education]. BIP AWF. <https://bip.awf.krakow.pl/attachments/article/1509/mgr%20Joanna%20Ciepielowska%20-%20praca%20doktorska.pdf>
- Conroy, D. E., & Elliot, A. J. (2004). Fear of failure and achievement goals in sport: Addressing the issue of the chicken and the egg. *Anxiety, Stress & Coping*, 17(3), 271–286. 10.1080/1061580042000191642
- Czarnecka, D. (2023). Aerobics made in Poland: Women’s mass leisure activity in the socialist state, 1983–1989. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 40(14), 1287–1306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2024.2306871>
- Devetak, R. (2009). After the event: Don DeLillo’s white noise and September 11 narratives. *Review of International Studies*, 35(4), 795–815. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990192>
- FIG – Federation Internationale de Gymnastique. (2024). History. Retrieved March 5, 2024, from <https://www.gymnastics.sport/site/pages/disciplines/aer-history.php>
- Frank, A. (1995). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness and ethics*. University of Chicago Press.
- Gallmeier, Ch. P. (1989). Traded, waived, or gassed: Failure in the occupational world of ice hockey. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 13(1), 25–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019372358901300103>
- Geissler, P. W. (2023). A failing anthropology of colonial failure: Following a driver’s uniform found at Amani research station, Tanzania. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 29(S1), 167–189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13908>
- Goodley, D., Lawthom, R., Liddiard, K., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2019). Provocations for critical disability studies. *Disability & Society*, 34(6), 972–997. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1566889>
- Gustafsson, H., Davis, P., & Davis, L. (2023). Fear of failure in athletes: Fanning the fire of sport desire or burning out? In A. Mica, M. Pawlak, A. Horolets & P. Kubicki (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook of failure* (pp. 53–66). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429355950-6>



- Halberstam, J. (2011). *The queer art of failure*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822394358>
- Haraway, D. (1994). A Game of cat's cradle: Science studies, feminist theory, cultural studies. *Configurations*, 2(1), 59–71. <https://doi.org/10.1353/con.1994.0009>
- Harris D. S., & Eitzen, D. S. (1978). The consequences of failure in sport. *Urban Life*, 7(2), 177–188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124167800700203>
- Holmes, D. S. (1970). Differential change in affective intensity and forgetting of unpleasant personal experience. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 15(3), 234–239. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0029394>
- Hüsken, U. (Ed.) (2007). *When rituals go wrong: Mistakes, failure, and the dynamics of ritual*. Brill Academic Publishers.
- Iknoian, T., & Reimer, L. J. (1991, January 1). Aerobic competitions: Your complete guide to the sport of competitive aerobics – The top championships, winners, prizes and 1991 forecast – Plus how you can enter. American Fitness. <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Aerobic+competitions%3a+your+complete+guide+to+the+sport+of+competitive...-a010456480>
- Jezierski, R. (1999, September). *Akademicki aerobik [Academic aerobics]*. Lady Fitness.
- Levy, J. S. (1994). Learning and foreign policy: Sweeping a conceptual minefield. *International organization*, 48(2), 279–312. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300028198>
- Lewis, S. (2014). *The Rise: Creativity, the gift of failure, and the search for mastery*. William Collins.
- Mica, A., Pawlak, M., Horolets, A., & Kubicki, P. (2023). FAIL! Are we headed towards critical failure studies? In A. Mica, M. Pawlak, A. Horolets & P. Kubicki (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook of failure* (pp. 3–22). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429355950-2>
- Moch, B. (2017, September 25). The World Games – przechodzi do historii sportu (podsumowanie) [The World Games has made it into the history of sports (Recapitulation)]. <https://www.wroclaw.pl/twg2017/the-world-games-przechodzi-do-historii-sportu-podsumowanie>
- Napiórkowski, M. (2022). *Naprawić przyszłość: Dlaczego potrzebujemy lepszych opowieści, żeby uratować świat [Fixing the future: Why we need better stories to save the world]*. Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Oppermann, K., & Spencer, A. (2023). Foreign policy failure: A narrative analysis. In A. Mica, M. Pawlak, A. Horolets & P. Kubicki (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook of failure* (pp. 177–191). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429355950-16>
- Sagiv, L., & Schwartz, S. H. (2022). Personal values across cultures. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 73, 517–546. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-020821-125100>

- Sassen, S. (2016). Economic cleansing: Failure dressed in fine clothes. *Social Research*, 83(3), 673–687. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2016.0049>
- Skotnicka, M. (2023). Charakterystyka morfologiczna i funkcjonalna zawodniczek aerobiku sportowego w kontekście osiągniętych wyników [Morphological and functional characteristics of sports aerobics contestants in the context of the results they achieved] [Doctoral dissertation, Poznań University School of Physical Education]. AWF Poznań. <https://awf.poznan.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Rozprawa-doktorska-mgr-Marta-Skotnicka.pdf>
- Sundwall, C. (2017). Miracles and crushed dreams: Material disillusions in the design industry. In T. Carroll, D. Jeevendrampillai, A. Parkhurst & J. Shackelford (Eds.), *The material culture of failure: When things do wrong* (pp. 21–38). Bloomsbury.
- Van Luyn, A., & Wise, B. (2024). Tactical storytelling and paradoxical failure: Writing, knowledge-making and the public humanities. *Humanities Research*, 20(1), 151–168. <https://doi.org/10.22459/HR.XX.01.2024.10>

### **Povzetek**

V drugi polovici devetdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja si je Hanna Fidusiewicz, nekdanja članica poljske reprezentance v športni gimnastiki, prizadevala, da bi športna aerobika postala nacionalna športna disciplina. Njena prizadevanja so bila neuspešna. Poljska še do danes nima nacionalne ekipe za športno aerobiko. Članek etnografsko obravnava pomen neuspeha. Izhajajoč iz analize etnografskih intervjujev s Hanno Fidusiewicz, ki so jih opravili več kot dvajset let po dogodkih, je v njem opisana in analizirana kompleksnost odnosov in razumevanj, ki v danem kontekstu prispevajo k vzpostavitvi neuspeha.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: neuspeh, pripoved, Poljska, športna aerobika, čas

CORRESPONDENCE: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Al. Solidarności 105, 00-140 Warsaw, Poland. E-mail: [dominique.czarnecka@gmail.com](mailto:dominique.czarnecka@gmail.com)