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The *NARUTO* fan generation in Poland: An attempt at contextualization

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Introduction

The object of this paper is to characterize the *NARUTO* fan generation by positioning it within the history of the Polish fan movement and relating it to the domestic comics market. There is almost no scholarly research on the subject of manga and anime¹ in Poland, especially with respect to fandom and its relation to the comics/manga market. Most of the available articles are by journalists or fans with little background knowledge on comics, and in many cases they are based on debatable sources, such as discussion boards and Wikipedia. Comics print-runs, on the other hand, are mainly kept confidential by publishers. That is why most of the information for this paper had to be acquired through field work, i.e. official and unofficial conversation with publishers, booksellers and fans. My research was mainly conducted during the three years prior to writing this article, that is actually based on field data which I have collected since 1998, when I became active in the fandom (it goes without saying that my intention was not academic at first, but rather related to the market and

¹ The words *manga* and *anime* are used here meaning comics and animation of Japanese origin.

the possibility of turning my hobby into a business). As a researcher, publisher and comics fandom activist I also had access to confidential data that cannot be quoted directly here.

My point of departure is a short introduction to the current situation of comics and manga in Poland. This is important as the situation is quite different from other countries on the same continent, not to mention Japan or the United States. And since the roots of the current situation are historical, history also needs to be briefly presented in order to understand how *NARUTO* fans, who form the third manga fan generation in Poland, differ from those fans who became familiar with Japanese sequential art in earlier years. In the last part then, I will touch upon the future of Poland's manga market.

1. Comics in Poland: present situation

The comics market in Poland looks currently rather unusual compared to the United States, Japan, and Western European countries. This can be traced back to the mainly negative policy and attitude towards comics, taken by the post-WW II communist government (Kurc 2003: 34; Bolałek 2009: 60-61). In the early 1990s many Western mainstream comics were published in Poland (Szyłak 1998: 147), among them a huge number of superhero comics (in the years 1992-1994, more than 100 titles yearly) released mostly by Tm-Semic (KZ 2003, internet). However nowadays, mainstream series in the fantasy and horror genres, even superhero comics from the United States, and popular gag comics from France are rarely published anymore. The largest share of the market is taken by titles that are often classified as "artistic" (works by Moebius and Bilal) or "alternative" (works by Crumb and Thompson). The only mainstream series² available in Poland are those which exceed the classification as mere "pulp comics" (for ex., *Hellboy*, *Sin City*), and they are brought out by the big international publisher EGMONT.

However, EGMONT is highly exceptional. In contrast, the majority of publishing houses consist of people who work with comics only in their free time (with the exception of the manga publishers, who attend to manga during their regular working hours). They prefer high-quality titles to commercial hits. While this is one of the reasons for the specific range of available titles in Poland, the second reason lies in the readers themselves. Comics readership is small³. Not many people actually buy

² EGMONT publishes one-shot superhero comics, and the publisher Mucha publishes superhero series, but less than ten titles appear each year.

³ It is hard to evaluate the actual number of readers. Sales numbers may give the impression that

comics, and most of those who do, favor artistic titles over entertainment, as is evident from the fact that almost all companies that made an attempt at publishing Western mainstream comics were rather short-lived. Manzoku⁴ is a good example in that regard. They focused mainly on titles originally realized by DC⁵ in the United States, but did not publish regularly, and their activity was rather short-lived because they did not make enough profit to continue their business. Another attempt at publishing superhero titles called “Dobry Komiks” (En. *Good Comic*) was short-lived as well. Owned by Axel Springer Polska, a big international publishing company, they published well-known titles like *New X-men* or *Superman & Batman*.

As for the print runs, usually their numbers rank between 800 and 1500. But they may be even as low as 200 for lesser known Polish authors that publish in anthologies like *Kolektyw*. Only a few titles exceed 1500 copies (old classics, and *Thorgal* by Grzegorz Rosiński⁶, a Polish author working for the Franco-Belgian market).

2. Japanese comics in Poland

Manga, on the other hand, have higher print runs (from 1500 to 5000⁷), but until recently, manga themes and art were not really appreciated by general comics readers, and there were no reviews of manga in mainstream media. This is due to the fact that the majority were comedies or action-packed titles for teenagers, and that publishers marketed them exclusively to manga/anime fans. Until 2007, there were three major publishers of manga in Poland, the oldest one being JPF founded in 1996. They published all the big hits for the teenagers such as *Sailor Moon*⁸, *Dragon Ball*⁹

there are less than 2000 fans of Western comics, but over 20.000 who read comics occasionally. These numbers are misleading; taking into account pirated versions available on the Internet (mainly in English), there is a much larger readership.

4 The Japanese name is misleading, as the company did not publish any Asian comics.

5 These were not typical superhero comics, but mainly Wildstorm and Vertigo imprints.

6 Grzegorz Rosiński was born in Poland in 1941. *Thorgal*, a fantasy tale about a man who came from the stars and was raised by Vikings, is his best-known work. The first volume was published in 1977. By 2010, a total of 32 volumes had been released. Until volume 30, the scenario was written by Jean Van Hamme. From volume 30 onwards, Yves Sente took over.

7 The number 5000 was mentioned in an interview with Yasuda Shin, owner of Poland's first manga publishing house JPF (szczecinbiznes.pl 2010, Internet). Their bestselling title (and THE bestselling manga in Poland) is *NARUTO*, which gives the impression that the above-mentioned number is due to this series. 1500 copies is the official number given by some publishers, but there are a few digitally published titles (for example, *Crying Freeman*) that would suggest even lower print runs (with print-runs over 500 copies, it is cheaper to stick to the traditional way, that is, offset printing).

8 The title *Sailor Moon* is commonly used in many countries, also in Poland. The official Polish title is *Czarodziejka z Księżycy* (Jp. *Bishōjo senshi Sērā Mūn*).

9 Many manga titles of Polish translations are left in English (*Dragon Ball*, *Vampire Knight*) or even in Japanese (*Yami no matsuei*).

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and *NARUTO*, but among their titles one can also find *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell*. The second manga publisher was Waneko founded in 1999. They started from rather old titles (for example, *Lock Superczłowiek* [En. *Lock the Superhuman*, Jp. *Chōjin Rokku*]) but they quickly put more stress on titles for a younger audience, and now their catalogue includes *Vampire Knight*; the release of *Kuroshitsuji* (En. *Black Butler*) has also been announced. One of their most important contributions to the Polish market was publishing the regular manga magazine *Mangamix* (2001-2004). The third and last company is the international corporation called Egmont. They published the titles that appealed to older fans, like *Gunsmith Cats* or *Ranma 1/2*¹⁰. Unfortunately lately they announced their intent to withdraw from publishing manga.

There were four more companies before 2007 that published manga—TM Semiec (as previously mentioned, their main field was superhero comics; accordingly, they published manga in American comic-book format), Arashi (they published only one title, *Metropolis* by Tezuka), Mandragora¹¹ (they published the two series *Vagabond* and *Samotny wilk i szczenię* [En. *Lone Wolf and Cub*, Jp. *Kozure Ōkami*]), and Saisha (a BL/yaoi publisher¹²). The latter's failure is surprising when compared to the popularity of the BL/yaoi genre in neighboring Germany.

Before 2007, only a few manga titles addressed grown-ups, which gave Polish readers of Japanese comics mainly the following three options. First, simply to stop reading manga, which was the most common choice; second, to switch to Western comics, which some male readers did, and third, to continue reading Japanese comics, which (as mentioned before) meant reading mainly titles addressed to youngsters. In 2007, Hanami started to publish Japanese titles for grown-ups, that is to say, titles which can be appreciated not only by "hardcore manga fans", but also by comics lovers in general or even by people that have little or nothing to do with sequential art. Titles like *Suppli* and *Solanin*, or Taniguchi Jirō's manga relate universal topics. This helped manga in Poland reach out for a new audience. Manga by Hanami are reviewed in general media (such as newspapers, magazines, TV and radio programs).

Before that, many people were misled by stereotypes when forming an opinion on Japanese comics. The most common argument against manga was that they were

¹⁰ Titles like *Ranma 1/2* are not strictly aimed at an older audience, but fans from the first generation, the so-called *Sailor Moon* generation, would appreciate them as adult reading material.

¹¹ They published mainly Polish comics and superhero comics from the United States. Beside those comics and two manga series, they published some manhwa but dropped the line due to low sales.

¹² In the BL/yaoi genre, there was a publishing house called Kasen. They published manhwa and original Polish "manga" as well.

infantile. Critics compared, for example, manga series like *NARUTO* to graphic novels such as the American comics *Maus*, exposing their mixing up of genres and related target groups. Admittedly, among the “manga fans”¹³, there were many grown-ups and older teens who read titles initially aimed at teenagers. Also, Polish publishers often chose a higher age rating for the translations than the original Japanese version. Let’s take two titles that run in *Shōnen Jump magazine* (which in Japan is targeted to kids but actually also read by older males and even women): While *NARUTO* in Poland has the “15+” mark on its cover (recommended to ages 15 and up), *Hiroszima 1945. Bosonogi Gen* [En.: *Barefoot Gen*, Jp.: *Hadashi no Gen*] was rated 18+. Although this title can more reasonably be compared to *Maus*, it differs from the latter that is for “all ages”. Considered a title for adults ironically only strengthened the impression that manga are infantile.

There is no law in Poland that makes the above-mentioned ratings an obligation for publishing houses. Probably, they were introduced voluntarily because of the scandals that involved titles like *Sailor Moon*, and *Dragonball*, or the suicide of a young *Hellsing* fan. Those three titles were accused of promoting violence and pornography, and thus being harmful for kids. There were TV programs¹⁴ exclusively dedicated to *Sailor Moon* (describing the series as showing young girls with very aggressive attitudes and in too erotic poses) and *Dragon Ball* (focusing on the scene where Bulma pulls up her skirt, but unfortunately forgot to put on pants, and disparaging the series as a “porn comic that should not find its way into children’s hands”¹⁵). Despite a few scenes that might be inappropriate for younger readers, most of the scandals were an obvious exaggeration (like when *Sailor Moon* was blamed for introducing children to witchcraft), but nevertheless, manga in Poland received some bad PR. One example is an article about the above-mentioned suicide: “It is likely that the cause of this suicide was Japanese comics, completely foreign to us from a cultural point of view”¹⁶.

13 During a discussion panel (that is, a meeting at Hanami in 2010), someone opined that Polish fandom itself was infantile. One participant pointed out that she did not understand how it was possible that Polish fans in their twenties or even thirties preferred titles aimed at teenagers to graphic novels for grown-ups.

14 It is hard to quote exact programs or opinions. Accusations of manga/anime for having a bad influence on children appeared mainly in television and radio programs (in the late 1990s and early 2000s). Many of them were broadcasted live, and it is almost impossible to access the original recordings. A few recorded shows can be found on the internet, but without the acknowledgment of their creators. Because of copyright considerations, I refrain from linking them here.

15 The quotation is from the program “Uwaga!” (12th July, 2003). Half of the program was dedicated to *Dragon Ball*.

16 The article was originally published in the Polish tabloid *Super Express*, and is still available on the internet (anime.com.pl, internet).

3. Anime in Poland

Among the first anime that appeared on Polish television in the 1980s¹⁷ were *Zaloga G*¹⁸ [Jp.: *Kagaku Ninja-tai Gatchaman*, En.: *Battle of the Planets*] and *Pszczółka Maja* [Jp.: *Mitsubachi Māya no bōken*, En.: *Maya the Bee*]. None of the anime titles aired today (or even *Harry Potter*) is as popular as the early programs were at the time, because back then, there were no cable television or satellite dishes in Poland yet, and there were only two television channels. Given the small living quarters and the fact that there was only one TV set per household, almost every child and his whole family were watching all television programs aimed at kids, regardless of the subject or the country of origin. Awareness that a title was made in Japan (or calling it “anime”) was close to zero. Every anime aired in Poland was inspired by stories of European origin after all. The first four cinematic features¹⁹ that appeared in Poland, were: *Kot w butach* ([Jp.: *Nagagutsu o haita neko*, En.: *The Wonderful World of Puss n’Boots*] in 1972), *Mała syrena* ([Jp.: *Anderusen dōwa ningyo hime*, En. *Hans Christian Andersen’s The Little Mermaid*] in 1976), *Podróż Kota w butach* [Jp.: *Nagagutsu o haita neko hachijū-nichikan sekai isshū* “[En.: *Puss n’Boots Travels Around the World*] (in Poland in 1977), *Dzieci wśród piratów* [Jp.: *Dōbutsu Takarajima*, En.: *Animal Treasure Island*] (in Poland in 1979). The first and third one were inspired by a fable by Charles Perrault, and the second was based on Jules Verne’s *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingt jours* [En.: *Around the World in Eighty Days*]. *Dōbutsu Takarajima* is of course the animated adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson’s famous novel *Treasure Island*, and the Japanese and English titles of *Anderusen dōwa ningyō hime* reveal the origin of the story.

Initially European stories were not the only reason that people in many cases did not consider them productions from Japan. The second reason can be traced back to why those anime were chosen for screening in Poland. *Nagagutsu o haita neko*, for example, had received an award at the Moscow Film Festival in 1970.

The same applies to television series. Among the first screened series were titles like *Cudowna podróż* ([Jp.: *Nils no fushigina tabi*, En.: *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*], based on Selma Lagerlöf’s *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige*), *D’Artagnan i trzej muszkieterowie* [Jp.: *Wan Wan Sanjūshi*, En.: *Dogtanian and the*

¹⁷ No source known to author quotes exact dates of screening. It might be possible to find out the exact screening dates by examining, for example, the TV program section of the major newspapers.

¹⁸ The series was probably already screened in Poland in the late 1970s (Kostuła 1998).

¹⁹ Those movies were recognizable as animation from Japan because of Polish posters that explicitly stated “Japanese animated movie”.

Three Musketeers] (Alexander Dumas' *Les trois mousquetaires* [En.: *The Three Musketeers*]) and *Dookoła świata z Willy'm Fogiem* ([Jp.: *Anime hachijū-nichikan sekai isshū*, En.: *Around the World with Willy Fog*] again based on Jules Verne's *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingt jours*) or even the previously mentioned *Mitsubachi Māya no bōken* (an adaptation of Waldemar Bonsel's *Die Biene Maja und ihre Abenteuer* [En.: *The Adventures of Maya the Bee*]). All of them had been screened previously in other European countries and did not come to Poland directly from Japan. Even more so, most of them were co-productions. For example *Wan Wan Sanjūshi* and *Anime hachijū nichikan sekai isshū* were produced by a Japanese-Spanish team, and *Mitsubachi Māya no bōken* was a Japanese-German-Austrian co-production.

4. The “*Sailor Moon* generation”: Awareness of anime’s Japanese origin

The beginning of an awareness of anime’s Japanese origin came probably in the early 1990s with titles like *Kapitan Jastrzab* [En.: *Capitan Tsubasa*] or *Generał Daimos* [Jp.: *Tōshō Daimosu*, En.: *Brave Leader Daimos*] where all main characters were Japanese. But those were aired by Polonia 1, a network owned by an Italian company which broadcasted the anime in Italian with Polish voiceovers²⁰; this was rather confusing for young viewers. However, the above-mentioned titles were well known, and probably almost every child living in Poland in the 1990s watched them at least a few times on television, as there were only a few channels that aired animated series.

But the emergence of people who called themselves anime/manga fans is connected to three subsequent anime series²¹—namely, *Sailor Moon*, *Dragon Ball* and *NARUTO*. The fans from the respective periods, or “generations”, differ significantly from each other, mainly due to the times that they were living in and how they treated their hobby.

The first big anime/manga boom in Poland occurred when *Sailor Moon* appeared on TV (first in 1994). All “generations” included “casual watchers”. However, for the first time, there were also people (especially teenage girls) that wanted more than the TV series. Since communism had just fallen in 1989, almost everything “Western” was welcomed, but at the same time there was a group of people that had enough of “Western” (mainly American) products, and “anime” offered them an alternative.

Those girls who liked *Sailor Moon* began to look for fellow fans. Actually, there

²⁰ A kind of incomplete dubbing, in which the Italian voices could still be heard. Even the opening songs were in some cases in Italian.

²¹ Only a few fans became familiar with Japanese comics directly through manga; in most cases it was anime.

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were some—in almost exclusively male SF, Fantasy and RPG clubs, or in the computer demo scene. Those young males were in contact with Western friends mainly from Germany who introduced them to anime. Suddenly, two worlds met—boys and girls. Both groups mixed and formed something that could be called the cradle of the manga/anime fandom. They watched anime together, exchanged video tapes, and even went out on dates. It is noteworthy that one had to be a member of this community in order to get new titles, and that those people were not only into anime, but also into Japanese culture. Manga did not play an important role, because it was harder to get them than anime—they couldn't be copied and distributed as easily (the copying of video tapes was not that easy, but there were “gurus” in the community who provided the necessary technical expertise). Manga had to be borrowed, and only a few publications were available. But when something appeared, regardless whether it was published in Poland or brought in from abroad, fans spent their last penny to get it.

In the first few years, everyone was able to take part in discussions, because there was some sort of canon that everybody shared. Manga started to play a more important role when more titles became available in Polish, and especially when fans of *Dragon Ball* appeared.

5. The *Dragon Ball* generation: an entrance to the digital era

Pokemon and *Dragon Ball* are two hit series that appeared in Poland almost at the same time, around 2000. The first one became famous among a younger audience, but not as a manga. *Pokemon* figures were available with children's meals, official merchandising was sold everywhere, and kids were exchanging cards in school on such a large scale, that it was discussed in the Polish media as a social problem²². The *Pokemon* manga appeared as well, but it was put on hold after only four short volumes (taken from one Japanese tankōbon volume). The reason of this failure was simple—the monochrome manga edition could not compete with *Pokemon* titles in colour, that is, anime books of a mainly poor quality. Not surprisingly, the *Pokemon* cult among kids did not have a big impact on the manga/anime scene. For children, it was a temporary hobby, centered on exchanging cards and goodies, and thus something similar to collecting strips from Donald bubblegums in the 1980s²³ which was not directly connected to the popularity of the comics either. *Pokemon*'s success was later repeated by *Yugi-oh*, mainly because of the cards sold for both.

²² For example in the previously mentioned TV program “Uwaga!”.

²³ There was a bubblegum with short comic strips about Disney characters. Many kids collected and exchanged them, without being dedicated Disney fans.

Dragon Ball on the other hand triggered the search for more, like *Sailor Moon* five years earlier. But the market and other conditions were completely different by now. Manga fans had an easier start. First of all, there was a fair selection of titles (*Sailor Moon*, *Fushigi Yūgi*, *Oh My Goddess!*, *X* and since 2001 *Dragon Ball*). And there was no need for “gurus” anymore, who had the skill (and the equipment) to copy video tapes, because exchange was easier through digital means like CD-ROMs. Also, the Internet could be used not only for contact between fans, but increasingly also as a source of anime and later manga contents. Another difference was that fans had a much smaller interest in Japanese culture. In addition, the most popular titles were different from the previous generation, when SF, Fantasy and Cyberpunk had ranked top (with titles such as *Akira*, *Record of Lodoss War* or Studio Ghibli films). Now, fans were more into comedies, cute girls and “big breasts”. Slowly also the yaoi fandom—that could even be called a sub-fandom (as they had their own exclusive conventions and their own web pages)—was forming.

6. The *NARUTO* generation: an “aggressive” digital generation

Currently, the biggest group within Polish fandom is that of the *NARUTO* generation. And it is much different from the previous ones. First of all, fans usually start to read manga much earlier; these days 12 year-old fans are not surprising anymore²⁴. The fans of the *Sailor Moon* generation were at least 15 years old, which was the minimum age to get access to SF/Fantasy/RPG clubs at that time, and also the minimum age that most parents would allow kids to go to events outside town (because of the limited number of manga and anime events, fans had to travel across Poland to participate in them). Furthermore, most fans of the second generation were already university students (and therefore had Internet access).

The *NARUTO* generation is the most “digitalized” among all three fan generations, using the Internet and mobile phones every day. And they are the generation in which manga is playing the most important role. But in many cases they do not buy manga, rather, they read illegal scanlations online. In 2008, a survey conducted by the Polish *NARUTO* publisher JPF on one of the most popular of many *NARUTO* fan sites, asked the question “Do you own any *NARUTO* manga that appeared in Poland?”. Only 13% answered that they owned all of them, 15% had a few volumes, 4% had one volume, but 68% did not own even a single volume²⁵! If they buy anything at all, it is *NARUTO*

²⁴ Please recall that *NARUTO* is recommended as [15+].

²⁵ The site where the original survey was conducted went down, but the results are still available on an unofficial discussion forum of JPF (mangaforum, internet). On the same forum there are many

merchandise, mostly imitations “Made in China”.

Also, their attitude toward other fans is in many cases very intolerant and even offensive. Admittedly, this “aggressiveness” is limited to verbal assaults on the Internet, but they do not tolerate any criticism of their favourite series. For example, when JPF, the publisher of *NARUTO*, in March 2008 demanded on the Internet that scanlations should be removed from web pages, it received many offensive mails and letters. This indicates some sort of paradox. While previous generations were using the Internet to get to know each other, certain *NARUTO* fans are using it to stay anonymous. On the other hand, they often participate in conventions²⁶. But when it comes to reading manga, most fans of this generation limit their activity to *NARUTO*. Although there is also a group that goes beyond that, usually they only read the most popular *shōnen* titles such as *Bleach* or *One Piece*.

Because of their attitude, *NARUTO* fans who are fixated on that specific franchise only are called “Narutards” by other manga fans, derived from “Naruto” and “retard”—an offensive word meaning “a person with a mental retardation” or “a stupid person, one who is slow to learn”. But this is not specifically Polish.

Another characteristic of this generation is the amount of money they spent on gadgets. During their events there are more stands with products connected to anime/manga than anime/manga works as such.

Of course there are fans from the *NARUTO* generation who look beyond their favorite manga/anime. And generally speaking, all the fans, including so-called “Narutards”, make Japanese comics more popular. They introduce their hobby to other people, who from time to time also become fans (or at least casual readers/watchers). But the *NARUTO* generation is using pirated sources of manga/anime more than any other generation before, simply because they have an easier access to the Internet and to a wide range of scanlated titles. The problem of piracy has existed for some time, and it is not limited to this generation, but now it cannot be justified so easily anymore. Fifteen years ago there were no manga or anime in Polish and it was extremely difficult to buy something from abroad. Ten years ago there were more titles in Polish, but titles in other languages were still extremely expensive. In the last five years the selection of titles has become much bigger, as almost all titles ever published are still available,

strong (even aggressive) comments by people who were reading or even administrating web pages with illegal translations.

²⁶ The number of amateur-organized manga/anime in events in Poland is larger than ever—with a few events every month—whereas about ten years ago it was a few events per year, mainly held in summer.

and each month new volumes appear. Also, everyone who is older than thirteen years can have a debit card (with their parents' permission) which makes it possible to order anything from across the world. Of course, the difference between wages in Poland and in Western Europe or the United States is still big²⁷, but it is not impossible to buy comics in English (or in other languages) even with a moderate income, and many "true fans" do so. The language skills are not the problem here because pirated versions are read/watched in English as well.

On the other hand, there is also a group that started appreciating (and buying) manga because of *NARUTO*. Some *NARUTO* fans will eventually grow up, and maybe because of a wider availability of titles (including titles for grown-ups that Hanami specializes in), they will not stop reading comics. They might have a choice beside shōnen and shōjo titles, a choice that older generations did not have. But that will depend on the condition of the market itself.

Unfortunately, the comics market across the globe is facing a crisis. In countries like Japan, France, and the U.S., where comics culture has its own, deep-rooted tradition, crisis means lower sales and limitation of the range of titles. Lower revenue for publishers may lead to bankruptcy in a few cases. This applies first of all to independent publishing houses that publish only a few titles yearly. For them limitation means going below the point of profitability. The bankruptcy of Tokyopop U.S. shows that this could happen also to the biggest "players" in the market. Still, in the above-mentioned countries a wide range of titles will remain available. The biggest problem is that the manga medium might reach the point where only big commercial hits will be made available outside of Japan and the market will again focus only on teenager-oriented titles. In the case of emerging markets like Poland, all publishers can be considered "independent". Therefore, a crisis could lead to the complete disappearance of the manga market itself.

Since 2010 the popularity of *NARUTO* in Poland has been shrinking. It tends to be less popular, at least among fans attending the conventions. Apparently, there is not as much *NARUTO* merchandise available during such events anymore and even if it is, it is no longer visitors' first choice. Compared to previous years less people cosplay *Naruto* characters, and there are fewer panel discussions, contests, and speeches connected to the series.

Furthermore, according to comics store owners, the series' sales are decreasing.

²⁷ For example, around 2007 the median yearly income per household was as follows: United States: 31,111 \$ (2008), United Kingdom: 25,168 \$ (2007), France: 19,615 \$ (2007), Japan: 19,463 \$ (2006), Poland: 9,113 \$ (2007). (OECD, internet)

Its publishing frequency changed from bimonthly (4-5 issues per year) to monthly (around 10 issues yearly). Most *NARUTO* readers are children. It is said that them it is sometimes hard to afford a new volume every month, even at a price of 18,85 PLN²⁸. However, this price is lower than a ticket to the cinema or a happy meal at McDonald's in Poland. Manga (that can be enjoyed many times or simply resold to get some portion of the buying price back) is actually one of the lesser expensive hobbies. And when one compares the price of a *NARUTO* volume to the median monthly income, it turns out that it is the lowest among manga volumes consumed by the three above-mentioned generations. In 1997 (the year when *Sailor Moon* was first published), the average Polish reader could have bought almost 135 volumes of the most popular series at that time, *Sailor Moon*. In 2001 (when the *Dragon Ball* series started) it would have been about 159 volumes of *Dragon Ball* (and in 2003 *Dragon Ball* was even published biweekly). The number of *NARUTO* volumes that can be bought in 2010 is 171!

The other reason for the drop of sales is the rather poor percentage of people who actually read books in Poland. According to a survey conducted by the Polish National Library, more than 56% of Poles did not read any books at all in 2010 (Biblioteka Narodowa, Internet). Parents do not read for kids, and they do not encourage them to read either, nor do they give them money for books, including comics.

Of course the fall of *NARUTO*'s popularity at conventions is not only a result but also increasingly a cause for the drop of this series' popularity. As appearances of *NARUTO* become limited, only a few new people get interested in it during such events.

7. Is the *NARUTO* generation the last of its kind?

The drop of *NARUTO*'s popularity in Poland can be regarded as one of the causes of the current crisis in the manga sector, since each of the generations provided "fresh blood" to the fandom as well as new buyers to the market. Those of the *NARUTO* generation who grew up with manga and still are interested in it, do not buy comics but rather read scanlations. This, however, cannot be explained anymore by financial difficulties or limited access; previous generations had far less access and paid relatively more too. For contemporary fans it is more convenient to download contents or simply read it online. In addition, the diversity of reading preferences is now such that publishers cannot please one big group of fans. In fact, beside "Narutards" there are people from the *NARUTO* generation who are fans of only one or a few series, and they won't read anything else.

28 Less than 5 EUR. This is the official retail price; some bookstores offer discounts up to 25%.

The same applies to new readers, people who get attracted to one particular series or genre. Their number is too small to create an active fandom of one series which would eventually evolve into a new “generation” or a genre fandom like BL/yaoi groups. In the future more new readers will probably be attracted to certain titles only for a short time.

The variety of television channels makes it impossible for any series to gain wide popularity as it happened with previous generations that watched anime in Polish on major TV channels, and read manga officially translated into Polish. Firstly, anime is now mainly shown on smaller commercial TV stations that are frequented by less than 1% of population. Secondly, television does not play such a great role anymore, because console/computer gaming²⁹ and the Internet are now dominant forms of entertainment. So, it is unlikely that TV will trigger another new generation.

Paper books (or even e-books), as mentioned above, are not popular; reading, especially reading comics, is not a common option for spending free time anymore. Therefore manga is also unlikely to become the source of a new fan generation. However, the examples of *Harry Potter* or the *Twilight* series show that the emergence of big fan communities based on printed matter is still possible. On the other hand, those series were published a few years ago, and recently it is hard to find similar examples that have the same global impact. Right now we might be witnessing the sunset of the printed medium. The variety of Internet contents will probably not only hinder the development of a new “generation” but also lead to the fall of the manga market as we know it.

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²⁹ 44% of Poles in the age group 18-44 prefer gaming to any other form of activity (Interia.pl, Internet).

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