Debating Rapa Nui in Poland.
The 8th Conference of the Australia, New Zealand and Oceania Research Association *Rapa Nui – Between Two Cultures*.
Kraków, (3 December, 2015), The Australia, New Zealand and Oceania Research Association (ANZORA)

**Abstract:** The paper reports the Eight Conference organised by the Australia, New Zealand and Oceania Research Association (ANZORA) that focused on cultural, historical and political uniqueness of Rapa Nui. During the meeting scholars presented their research and experiences related to the island that is part of the Republic of Chile. The conference gathered academics from various disciplines: from anthropology, archaeology and social sciences up to physics.

**Keywords:** Rapa Nui; Oceania; Easter Island; Isla de Pascua; ANZORA

As every year, the Australia, New Zealand and Oceania Research Association (ANZORA) has organized an academic conference on another Pacific island. The last year’s topic was Rapa Nui – the Polynesian name of the Chilean territory on the South Pacific, commonly known as the Easter Island. The name of the conference, “Rapa Nui – Between Two Cultures” was chosen to express two strongly related sets of customs, history and politics. On one hand, Rapa Nui has its own language, culture and native population demanding self-determination. But on the other hand, the Easter Island (or in Spanish *Isla de Pascua*) is governed by the Chilean government, which was able to make it deeply dependent in almost every sphere of life. It has to be underlined the
The Rapa Nui conference in Kraków was the first conference discussing this country in Poland ever. Therefore, it gathered academics from different disciplines, like history, anthropology, political science, archaeology, physics and law.

ANZORA is the Polish academic association based in Kraków. It has its origins in June 2008 and was officially registered in November 2008. The main objective of establishing this society was to integrate the Polish academic circles dealing with any issue concerning the geopolitical region of Australia and Oceania. Secondly, the authors of formalizing the group wished to show the Polish academia the misleading counting up the Pacific as the part of East Asia, instead of perceiving it as the separate continent. The invitation was, and still is, open for the researchers representing various fields of science, who wish to actively promote knowledge about this part of the world, both in Poland and abroad. It is therefore a multidisciplinary society with a historian, Dr Dariusz Zdziech (Jagiellonian University), as the President.

On 21st January 2015, there was an opening of the “Embassy of the Pacific” (Ambasada Pacyfiku) – the restaurant with the Pacific cuisine, which also serves as the Pacific studies centre in Poland. Dr Zdziech was an initiator of this restaurant in Kraków, while his wife, Ilona Zdziech, took a lead in the kitchen as its chef. She is a reputable cook, one of a few in Europe dealing with the Pacific cuisine. The “Embassy of the Pacific” is a place, where ANZORA organizes a Pacific evening each month. The seminar took the form of a popular scientific presentation made by a researcher who was visiting certain Pacific island. The Pacific evenings are enriched by tasting the food from each Pacific country.

The 2015 conference of ANZORA took place on December 3 and concerned Rapa Nui/ the Easter Island constant debate on the island independence from the Chilean government. As there are not many specialists dealing with the Easter Island either in Poland or in Europe, the conference attracted especially those who are strongly connected with Rapa Nui. Hon. Professor Zdzisław Jan Ryn, former Ambassador of the Republic of Poland in Chile and Argentina and Professor Zuzanna Jakubowska-Vorbrich, the Head of the Department of Spanish and Latin-American History and Culture at the University of Warsaw added splendour to the conference.

Professor Jakubowska-Vorbrich made a presentation entitled *The 17th Century Texts on the Easter Island: Traveller Reports, Translation, Interpretation Problems*. As she spent many months on Rapa Nui, discovering its culture, she was able to introduce the audience with the contemporary customs of the population. The background of her stories was a documentary by Carmen Elia Brito Alvarado, *In Search of “Isla de Pascua”: the Lost Film*. Next, Dr Krzysztof Konstanty Vorbrich from the Space Research Centre at the Polish Academy of Science gave a speech on the theory and practice of sailing and non-satellite navigation to the Easter Island. Being a doctor of both physics and
English studies, he recalled some Rapa Nui legends and the historical records regarding the sailing. It needs to be added, Dr. Vorbrich possesses a professional qualification as a Master Marine, which is why his presentation was full of practical comments.

Dr Justyna Eska-Mikołajewska (Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz) presented the analysis of the international law status of Rapa Nui. She focused on the chronological shift from the territory of the autochthon population, Chilean colonisation and the last important date in 2007 – gaining the status of “special territory of Chile”. Being a political scientist, she emphasised the political and legal implications of the Rapa Nui statehood. The next speaker was Mrs Kamila Dombrowska (University of Gdańsk), making the research on the cultural anthropology in Oceania, especially in Vanuatu, and her native Kaszuby. Hence, she was discussing the connotation along with the image of Rapa Nui in the Polish literature.

Dr Michał Wasilewski (Jagiellonian University) was explaining the characteristic features of the Rapa Nui mythology, geoarchaeology and the settlement of the New World. He is an author of many publications concerning the South American archaeology, including the Easter Island. Finally Ms Joanna Siekiera, doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Law at the Victoria University of Wellington, presented the legal aspects of the Rapa Nui statehood that is the right to self-determination in the Organization of American States jurisdiction.

The last speaker, summarising the gathering, was the ANZORA President, Dr Zdziech. He made the closing remarks along with the presentation concerning the Rapa Nui tastes, the origins of the local meals, methods of the ingredients cultivation and the historical change in the cuisine. The conference was finished by the Rapa Nui evening with the movie display and the food tasting. Ambassador Ryn was a speaker during the evening, who his professional life in Chile in a very detailed and personal way.

The conference on Rapa Nui was the 8th edition made by ANZORA. The former academic gatherings were dealing with Vanuatu (2014), Kiribati (2013), Poles on the Pacific (2012), French Polynesia (2011), Australia (2010) and Tuvalu (2009). The next ANZORA conference is scheduled on May 2017.

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