



The movement between countries without moving: A German minority community archive in Poland and its impacts and practices

Photographs :

1. GMRC storage space. Information on the side of a shelf.
2. GMRC storage space. View along shelves.
3. Documentation and Exhibition Center of Germans in Poland. German minority candidates in Parliamentary elections in 1991.

dr. Magdalena Wiśniewska-Drewniak

Budapest, 12-14.05.2025



The IMPACT Project

- ⦿ „The impact of independent community archives”
- ⦿ National Science Center, no. 2022/47/D/HS3/00914
- ⦿ 2023-2026
- ⦿ PI: Magdalena Wiśniewska-Drewniak + Student Investigator + 2 Investigators
- ⦿ <https://impact.umk.pl/>
- ⦿ 3 case studies – 3 community archives in Poland
- ⦿ qualitative interviews with community archivists, associates, volunteers, users, audience
- ⦿ „thick” description + analysis of impacts (social & affective)



Centrum Badań Mniejszości Niemieckiej w Opolu

German Minority Research Center in Opole (GMRC)

Forschungszentrum der Deutschen Minderheit in Oppeln

<https://fzentrum.pl/>

<https://www.facebook.com/fzentrum>



CENTRUM BADAŃ MNIEJSZOŚCI NIEMIECKIEJ
FORSCHUNGSZENTRUM DER DEUTSCHEN MINDERHEIT

- ⦿ August 2024
- ⦿ 7h 20 mins of interviews
- ⦿ 7 interviewees
- ⦿ director, archivist,
collaborators, donors,
(users)



M. Wiśniewska-Drewniak with Ewa
Czeczor, 9.08.2024



THE BORDERS OF POLAND BEFORE AND AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR



Institute of National
Remembrance on
X/Twitter, 3.01.2022,
[https://x.com/ipngovpl
_eng/status/14779049
76252919809](https://x.com/ipngovpl_eng/status/1477904976252919809)

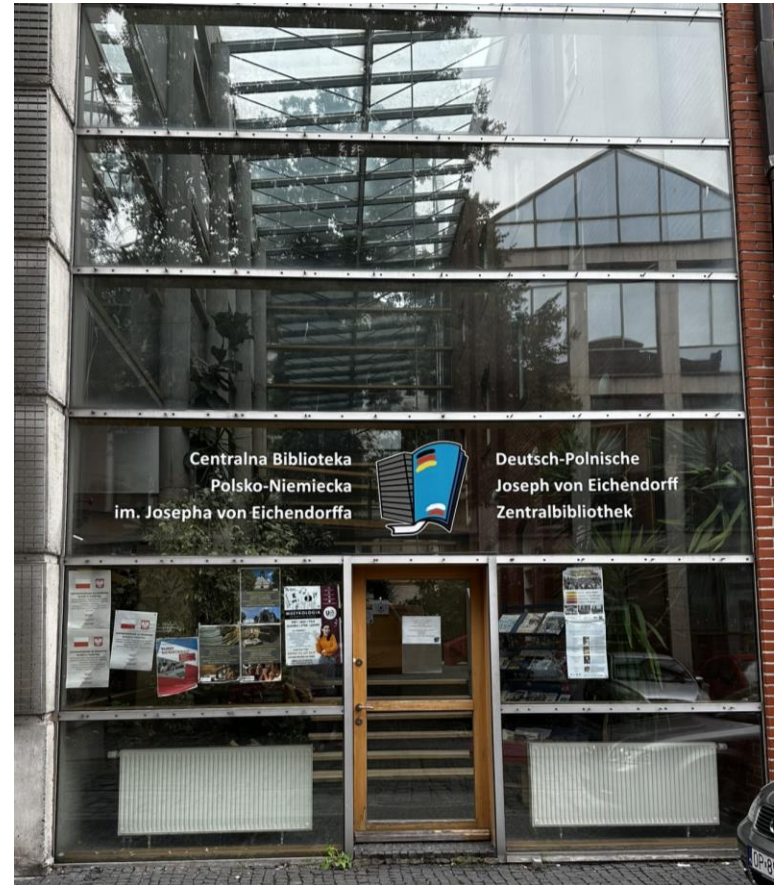


Germans in Poland after 1945

- ⊙ Red Army entry in 1945
- ⊙ migration and forced migration of Germans to the West
- ⊙ verification of nationality & rehabilitation of „Volksdeutsche”
- ⊙ camps for Germans
- ⊙ colonizing Western and Northern Lands by Poles from the lost Eastern Territories and from central Poland
- ⊙ „(re)polonization” / „degermanification”
- ⊙ discrimination
- ⊙ official narrative – there are no more Germans in Poland (unrecognized minority)
- ⊙ 1989/90 – democratic turn, freedom of association -> Germans in Poland may organize freely

German Minority Research Center

- ⦿ 1991 - Treaty of good neighbourhood, 2010-11 – Round Table (but no actions from the Polish side)
- ⦿ 2014 – House of Polish-German Cooperation (GMRC - small project)
- ⦿ 2020 – GMRC goes independent
- ⦿ association of associations
- ⦿ 2 „legs”: research + archive



Entry to the GMRC building – shared with the Central Polish-German Library

GMRC's motivations



Children visiting the GMRC's archive.

GMRC on Facebook, 17.12.2024,

<https://www.facebook.com/fzentrum/posts/pfbid046LSLBVJutYZ7xPFL142VcnSVnfTwMfvm4A5NtxWGLeMMbsNVsSkUUGMbveEaW>

kDI

- ⦿ cares for the continuity of German identity in Poland and the preservation of the German language among community members
- ⦿ supports intercultural dialogue
- ⦿ perpetuates the memory of the contribution of Germans to the history of the region
- ⦿ corrects erroneous narratives about Germans in Poland
- ⦿ motivates and inspires young researchers to deal with the subject of national minorities, including the German minority

GMRC's archive



- ⊙ the history of the organization of the German minority in Poland and, to some extent, the history of Germans in Poland after 1945
- ⊙ interviews with GM members
- ⊙ private archives of activists and politicians
- ⊙ GM organizations' documentation
- ⊙ publications for or about GM
- ⊙ mixed types (originals/copies, physical/digital)
- ⊙ 500 interviews, ca. 48 meters, 450 GB (22.000 files)



Sustainability challenges

- ⊙ „projectification” – almost exclusively project-based funding
- ⊙ uncertainty
- ⊙ difficult to plan future activities
- ⊙ impossible to fund unexpected material needs
- ⊙ expertise > remuneration

Social impacts

- ⊙ limited impact of the community
- ⊙ research value
- ⊙ meeting the needs of the community
 - GM organizations & individuals →
- ⊙ saving endangered heritage
- ⊙ minority impacts
 - „filling the gap”, telling untold stories, counter-narratives
 - maintenance of identity and language
 - „It’s more complicated”
 - showing the multicultural nature of Poland
 - dialogue with other minorities
 - becoming part of the mainstream



„Do I know if my grandchildren or great-grandchildren will be interested in this? They'll throw it in the furnace or to the waste and it just won't be there. I absolutely don't know. I, for one, always hoped that something like this [such as GMRC] would be built, and so many years it waited, and finally it was born.”

(Interview with Helmut Paisdzior, 7.08.2024)

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„So, we, of course, simply want us as a minority to survive, and therefore any action that causes people's knowledge of this minority, of its history, of its heritage to increase, it is important. This is something that is fundamental really. Without knowledge more than one generation cannot survive.”

(Interview with Michał Matheja, 5.08.2024)

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Social impacts 2

- ⦿ „competition on the heritage market”
- ⦿ GMRC as a partner (enriching the heritage/cultural/educational landscape)
- ⦿ women empowerment



Commemorative medal on the occasion of the bicentennial of Józef Lompa's birth awarded to Bernard Smolarek and the way it is stored in an archival box at GMRC Archives

Affective impacts

⦿ trust and lack of trust

- GM's lack of trust in public archives
- donors trust in GMRC
 - donors = individuals & GM organizations
 - important: being part of the community

„because when someone comes from outside, people don't want to donate, it's as if there's this trust in this environment, that we have this support of these [German minority organizations], and it's not that we want to give [these materials] to the state archive. [...] these people, I know that they, if they wanted to, would have gone to this state archive themselves. And they didn't go. Because this is a different story a little bit” (Interview with Ewa Cieczor, 9.08.2024)

Affective impacts 2

- ⊙ concern/fear/anxiety
- ⊙ trauma
- ⊙ „archival hardships”
- ⊙ sense of mission and satisfaction
- ⊙ passion and enthusiasm
- ⊙ joy and pleasure

A photograph from GMRC at the exhibition at
Documentation and Exhibition Center of
Germans in Poland, Opole





Personal impacts

1. „hard” impacts
 - remuneration, professional development
2. educational impacts
 - recording OH, digitization, archival description
3. „soft” impacts →



3. „soft” impacts

- giving back to the community
- deepened awareness and reflection (on history, social change, digitization, people's approaches to difficult moments in life)
- reflection on personal role in history
- distance from reality, reflection on uncertain future, appreciation of present
- different perception of some aspects of history
- seeing oneself in history
- noticing loss of community identity
- more critical attitude towards minority activists
- appreciation of work in culture
- feeling that I can make a difference
- fulfilling oneself
- good memories
- getting to know new people and new places



Negative personal impacts

- ⊙ interviews about difficult past
- ⊙ emotional distress
- ⊙ „so much trust you cannot handle it” (burden of trust) – responsibility (Ewa Cieczor)
- ⊙ „after each interview I would sit for half an hour and cry in the car” (Weronika Wiese)
- ⊙ ?impact on interviewees? – positive / negative

Thank you!

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Below: Examples of materials
from Polish CAs at
Zbioryspoleczne.pl;

signatures:

PL_1013_AP_001_001_006_003
, PL_1072_003_012_001_001,
PL_1005_01_E04_01_42,
PL_1061_AGA_038_002_003,
PL_1061_AGA_033_001_022,
PL_1027_3_1_2_1

