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# "It's my fourth child." The affective and personal impact of community archives

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# The context





# Community archives in Poland

- Term in Polish: *archiwum społeczne*
- 800 in the CCA's directory
- Local history, social history, social movements, war & communism, minorities...
- Increasingly popular and recognized



- *The Landscape of Community Archives in Poland and Its Contextual Environment*,  
*American Archivist*, 2025, 88(1), pp. 153-175.



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# The research project & process



# „Impact of Independent Community Archives”



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- <https://impact.umk.pl>
- 2023-2026
- Sponsored by the National Science Centre in Kraków, Poland (no. 2022/47/D/HS3/0091)
- Focus: understanding & describing social & affective impact of CAs
- PH1: desk research + interviews with experts (initial set of codes - impacts)
- PH2: 3 case studies (CAs)
- PH3: generalization





# The research proces (PH2)

- 3 cases – selected based on diversity
- For each case:
  - on-site visits (interviews, observations)
  - Archive's description (case report)
  - Impact analysis (additional investigators)
  - Narrative about the impact





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# The archives



# German Minority Research Center



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- *Forschungszentrum der Deutschen Minderheit / Centrum Badań Mniejszości Niemieckiej*
- an NGO working for the German minority in Poland (research & archiving)
- documenting the history of the German minority in Poland - emphasis on its organizing in the 1980s and after 1989/1990
- Difficult past (after WW2), forced migration and discrimination, difficult relations Germans-Poles, potentially traumatizing materials



# "It's my fourth child."



Author with Ewa  
Czeczor – back then,  
the head archivist at  
the GMRC

Opole, August 2024



# Dogs Community Archive



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- *Psie Archiwum Społeczne* (@dogstory100)
- Private individual – Paulina Bolinowska
- documenting the history of relations between dogs and humans; special focus: cynology in interwar Poland
- Bringing forgotten past, putting animal narratives first, encouraging animal activists to work together



# „Aren't you disappointed?"



Paulina Bolinowska,  
creator of the DCA,  
during our first interview  
Toruń, June 2025



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# The impacts



# Affective impacts

gratitude  
touched/moved  
trust/distrust appreciation  
delight joy surprise satisfaction  
sense.of.mission excitement  
dissatisfaction sadness dreams  
curiosity passion/enthusiasm  
pride sensitivity/empathy  
archive.draws.you.in mysticism  
nostalgia trauma disappointment  
fear pleasant archival.toil/burden  
attachment/loyalty



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# Trust/distrust

*[B]ecause when someone comes from outside, people don't want to donate, there's this trust in these circles, that we have this support of these institutions [German minority organizations], and it's not that we want to give it to the state archive. [...]*

*It's just that I know that these people, if they wanted to, would go to this state archive themselves. And they never did. **Because this is a different story.***

Ewa Czczor, Interview, 9 Aug 2024





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# Archival toil/burden

**Archival work =**

tiring,

time-consuming,

heavy,

monotonous,

aggravating,

overwhelming,

absorbing,

exhausting,

tedious





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# Sense of mission

*I had the feeling of such a mission, that I wanted to save it somewhere, but I also belonged to this community.*

Weronika Wiese, Interview, 6 Aug 2024

*We are doing our job. We are saving culture, we are extending something that is simply in us, because it is simply in us, it can't be denied.*

Ewa Czeczor, Interview, 5 Aug 2024



# Sensitivity/empathy



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*I think it was a huge challenge at that time, with that technology, when it took longer to take photos. So children cry, dogs move around, pant, well, I think it's a problematic situation. And [...] do these dogs belong to these families, these children, or [to the atelier]? And [...] what happens to them after the facility closes in the evening, where do they spend their time, can they, I don't know, go for a walk?*



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Paulina Bolinowska, Interview, 25 June 2025



# Negative emotional impact

- Related to recording oral history (GMRC)
- Ewa was overwhelmed by the trust she received from interviewees
- Weronika resigned after recording only several interviews:

*I was too emotional, and after each interview I would sit for half an hour and cry in the car, because something there moved me, and I thought that it was too much sometimes. [...] I couldn't keep my distance.*

Weronika Wiese, Interview, 6 Aug 2024

# *(Hard & educational) Personal impacts*



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- Becoming an expert
- Archival skills
- Oral history skills (recording, listening)
- Digital skills
- Acquiring new knowledge
- Remuneration
- Professional development





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# **(Soft) Personal impacts**

- Changing the way one perceives the past
- Self-fulfillment
- “I'm useful!”
- Deeper self-awareness
- Change of attitude
- Reflection
- Repaying a debt (to the community)
- New interpersonal contacts
- Good memories



# Conclusions



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- CAs may have profound impact on people
- Social impact – difficult to measure
- Affective and personal impacts – intangible but perhaps easier to reach?
- Great value of in-person interviews
- Our goal – narrative (not measuring or generalizing)
- Importance of context
- Challenging research process



Coneixent passats, creant futurs  
Knowing Pasts, Creating Futures  
Conociendo pasados, creando futuros  
Connaître le passé. Créer l'avenir



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# Thank you!

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