



'I AM THE GENERATION THAT WAS SAID TO TURN OFF THE LIGHTS.'

THE AFFECTIVE IMPACT OF A MINORITY-BASED COMMUNITY ARCHIVE

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.

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Amsterdam, July 2025



The IMPACT Project

- ⦿ „The Impact of Independent Community Archives”
- ⦿ National Science Center, no. 2022/47/D/HS3/00914
- ⦿ 2023-2026
- ⦿ research team: PI + 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
FORSCHUNGSZENTRUM DER DEUTSCHEN MINDERHEIT

German Minority Research Center in Opole (GMRC)

<https://fzentrum.pl/>

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

My visits:

August 2024

7h 20 mins of interviews

7 interviewees





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
- ⊙ camps for Germans
- ⊙ colonizing Western and Northern Lands by Poles from the lost Eastern Territories and from central Poland
- ⊙ „(re)Polonization” / „de-Germanization”
- ⊙ 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 national
identification in 2021

Census:

144,000

42,500 as the first

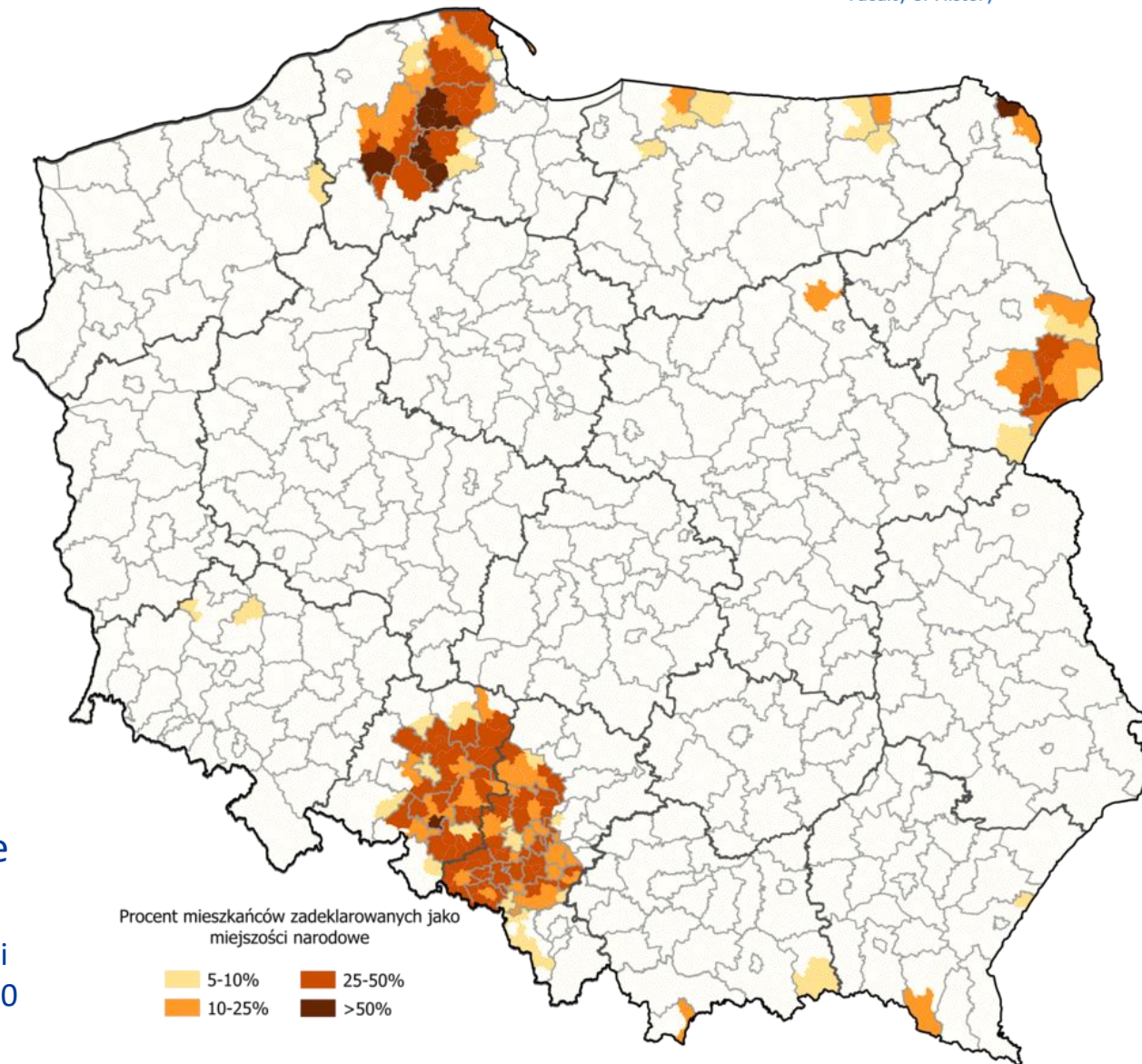
23,500 as the only

German spoken at home:

216,000

Percentage of residents
declared as national
minorities according to the
2021 Census.

https://pl.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plik:Mniejszo%C5%9Bci_w_Polsce_2021.png





I am the generation that was said to turn off the lights. And yet there is someone after us. And there will always be someone after us, only it will be a different German minority [...]

Ewa Cieczor, Interview, 9.08.2024

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 / 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
- ⊙ museum objects
- ⊙ mixed types (originals/copies, physical/digital)
- ⊙ 500 interviews, ca. 48 meters, 450 GB (22.000 files)



Trust and distrust



So I know all of them, most of them, they know me, so it was relatively easy for me to reach them, and some of them simply handed over their documents to me.

(Interview with Michał Matheja, 5.08.2024)



I always found that when these people sensed that I understood what they were talking about, they were able to open up.

(Interview with Ewa Czczor, 5.08.2024)



[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.

(Interview with Ewa Czczor, 9.08.2024)



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)



MWD: And if such an institution had not been established, would you have considered transferring it [your archive] to, for example, the state archives, to some kind of public institution?

HP: Most likely, yes, but to one that would be honest, not to those who would know that this was a different [national] option and would throw it in the trash.

MWD: So there was trust [in GMRC] that it would not be misused?

HP: Yes, because that could have happened.

(Interview with Helmut Paisdzior, 7.08.2024)



Sometimes you think it's overwhelming that this person has given you so much trust.

(Interview with Ewa Czczor, 9.08.2024)



Trauma and emotional distress



The social consent was that, after all, it was necessary to take revenge on these Germans, even though they were children at that point [during the war]. And these various difficult issues, they appear time and time again in documents and in interviews with people.

(Interview with Ewa Czczor, 5.08.2024)



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

(Interview with Weronika Wiese, 6.08.2024)



Sense of mission and satisfaction



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

(Interview with Weronika Wiese, 6.08.2024)



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.

(Interview with Ewa Czczor, 5.08.2024)



I'm very happy that I've been able to co-create this over these last few years here and secure a part of the region's history, and that's a very, very positive thing for me. This gave me the greatest satisfaction: getting to know these people. And the fact that I'm going [away] for a while or forever, it remains to be seen, but I've left my mark here and it makes me so happy, but also sad .

(Interview with Ewa Czczor, 9.08.2024)

Other affective impacts

- ⊙ concern/anxiety
- ⊙ „archival hardships”
- ⊙ passion and enthusiasm
- ⊙ joy and pleasure
- ⊙ sensitivity
- ⊙ disappointment
- ⊙ amazement

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





Thank you!

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<https://impact.umk.pl/>

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

