



A hobby, a responsibility, and a way to change the world – about engagement in an independent and civic/community archive

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Terminology

- ⊙ English: *community archive*
 - grass-roots
 - community ownership and control
 - marginalized groups
- ⊙ Polish: *archiwum społeczne*
 - voluntary engagement
 - for public good
 - without participation of the state
 - hence: civic archive



Archiwum Społeczne Chełmionki, Ryszard Kowalski przed budynkiem Collegium Minus UMK w Toruniu, 1950 [?], https://zbioryspoleczne.pl/dokumenty/PL_1186_0001_0001_0004_0001

The IMPACT Project

- ⦿ <https://impact.umk.pl>
- ⦿ 2023-2026 (2027?)
- ⦿ 4 investigators
- ⦿ 3 cases = 3 community archives
- ⦿ On-site visits, interviews
- ⦿ impact = causing some change
- ⦿ types of impact: social, affective, personal



Dogs Community Archive (Polish: *Psie Archiwum Społeczne*)

- ⦿ June & July 2025
- ⦿ Paulina – the creator
- ⦿ Instagram: @dogstory100
- ⦿ Zbiory Społeczne:
https://zbioryspoleczne.pl/archiwa/PL_2270
- ⦿ history of dogs, from the animal perspective,
esp. interwar Poland
- ⦿ photographs, postcards, publications, museum
objects, textual documents



Psie Archiwum Społeczne, Dog arlekin z kobietą, 1932,
https://zbioryspoleczne.pl/dokumenty/PL_2270_1_3_13



A hobby / a passion

- ⊙ Luna – Paulina's dog – who ignites the interest in dog's history
- ⊙ There is very little materials about dogs in heritage institutions...
- ⊙ ...and a very poor description
- ⊙ Interwar Poland's law was very progressive in animal welfare
- ⊙ ...and activists were united and strong



An entirely unknown world opened up before me, a very fascinating one. Also very aesthetically appealing [...]. And then I started to discover the other side of it, that there was a very large circle of people interested in animal welfare, dogs, that there was such a great development in this area, that these people connected with one another, clubs were formed, they supported one another, fought for changes in the law, for improvements in welfare. So this world also began to interest me in an intellectual, research-oriented way.

P. Bolinowska, Interview, 30.06.2025.



A way to change the world

- ⦿ documenting what is missing, has been omitted, is marginalized



[Laughter] It's so absurd that these material, inanimate things, devoid of feelings and so on, somehow attract more of our attention than all those living beings that lived alongside us. [...] So it's shocking to me, kind of... sad, right? Because from that point of view, I don't know, that intellectually we don't deal with it somehow makes us look bad. [...] The perspective is still very much set on the human being, on all our various creations. It's like a change [laughter], a very negative reflection that arose in me...

P. Bolinowska, Interview, 12.07.2025



A way to change the world

⦿ archival description focused on dogs

Doberman with two men in Łódź

PAS, Doberman z dwoma mężczyznami w
Łodzi, between 1922 and 1939,
https://zbioryspoleczne.pl/dokumenty/PL_2270_1_1_3



Puppy with a Polish Army soldier

PAS, Szczeniak z żołnierzem Wojska Polskiego,
n.d.,
https://zbioryspoleczne.pl/dokumenty/PL_2270_1_1_11



Shepherd with a woman

PAS, Owczarek z kobietą, n.d.,
https://zbioryspoleczne.pl/dokumenty/PL_2270_1_1_8





I do it deliberately [laughter], calculatingly, and maybe only because that perspective is missing, and even tags are missing in other archives sometimes. Of course, sometimes that dog or dogs, they're somewhere in the background and the family is more visible, and objectively speaking, it's actually a photo of a family with a dog or a photo of a girl, a child with a dog. But because that perspective is missing - that attentiveness to those other worlds besides the human one - I deliberately decided to do it this way (...) Above all, I want to shine a light on those animals. (...)

Of course, normally you would do it like this: there's some description and at the end '...and a dog is sitting on the lap.' That would be more logical, but deliberately and with malice toward others, I make these descriptions, putting the animals front and center.

P. Bolinowska, Interview, 30.06.2025.



A way to change the world

⦿ activating the archive



So that these objects would not just remain things on my shelf, almost like trophies, but would start to come alive, so that these stories would be brought back, and so that attention would be drawn to the fact that history is not only the history of people, but of all those worlds that are unfolding around us — that this, too, largely escapes our notice.

P. Bolinowska, Interview, 30.06.2025



Responsibility

- ⦿ Paulina feels the archive doesn't belong to her



I realized that I was in such a strange situation, that I had, privately for myself, a part of some larger history that no one knew about. I was in such a luxurious position, having something so unique that I could keep it for myself and enjoy it. Like collectors sometimes create a room for themselves and lock away the most outstanding works there, peeking in once in a while. But that really bothered me and gnawed at me, and it also somewhat annoyed me that no one knew about it (...). So, I thought that this was not something that someone could just suddenly appropriate and enjoy alone.

P. Bolinowska, Interview, 30.06.2025.



Responsibility

- ⦿ cooperation with the Center for Community Archives
 - Open System for Archiving (metadata and digital copies)
 - Zbiory Społeczne (web portal for digital access)



I had this sense of relief that finally these materials don't depend physically on me so much, that I simply freed myself from it by passing them on to the Center of [Community] Archives servers.

[...]

But also a great relief in connection with the fact that it stopped being just there on my shelf with me, and in case something happened, it could for example be destroyed.

This responsibility for the materials kind of lifted off me. So that was what I had last year, like 'ooo, uff!' [sound of relief]. It's there all the time now, and I keep adding to it currently, so on one hand there's this bit of fear, concerns, excitement, and relief that it stopped depending only on me.

P. Bolinowska, Interview, 12.07.2025



Conclusions

- ⊙ let's look at community archives beyond their informational value
- ⊙ community archives make us rethink traditional archival perspectives
- ⊙ important role of digital tools
- ⊙ impacts of community archives
 - contextual
 - varied
 - possible to study



Thank you!

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

