

IT IS MUCH MORE COMPLICATED: THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ABOUT COMMUNITY ARCHIVES IN POLAND

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INTRODUCTION

Community archives (grassroots collecting projects) have existed in Poland for a long time, their history can be traced back even to the second half of the 19th century. However, it is only in the last decade or so that the movement of grassroots, independent archives has seen a particular growth. Community archives are becoming increasingly popular. Currently, the database maintained by the Community Archives Centre in Warsaw lists more than 700 Polish community archives. They are becoming the subject of scholarly research and are also gaining interest from public archival institutions. They have also been finding their way into archival studies programs.

The objectives of the poster are to:

- discuss the challenges of teaching about community archives based on my experience as a teacher;
- discuss the role of teaching about community archives in the university-based archival programs.

THE CONTEXT

- higher education is free in Poland
- the program of Archival studies and records management (under different names) is currently present at 5 universities in Poland; my University's program is the oldest one and probably the most progressive
- community archives are gaining recognition in Poland, especially since 2012
- the topic of community archives can be found also in different courses, not devoted to community archives per se

THE COURSE

- since 2019, I have been teaching the course „Community Archives” as part of our Archival studies and records management program
- the course is placed in the first semester of the MA studies; a significant percentage of students are not Archival studies graduates
- the course lasts 15 hours – half of the regular course
- the content of the course:
 - What are community archives?
 - How they collect their materials?
 - What do they collect?
 - Infrastructure, funding, and partners
 - Arrangement and description, providing access, activities and outreach
 - Importance and impact of community archives
 - Presenting some community archives designs by students
- one meeting is with representatives of our partner – Center for Community Archives in Warsaw
- grading – project based; students design their own community archives; 17 elements of the project



THE CHALLENGES

- there is no consensus on the community archives definition
- the phenomenon is context-dependent and very diverse
- the international context makes everything even more complex
- community archives are/can be politically motivated and sensitive to changing social contexts
- they challenge many basic notions of classical archival science (provenance, objectivity, social roles of archives)
- there is not enough scholarly literature Polish and no manual
- some students in the group have no background in archives or any related discipline

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING ABOUT COMMUNITY ARCHIVES

- community archives are popular, numerous, and influential, and they are a growing part of the archival landscape – they cannot be ignored
- many people work with or in community archives – so they are potentially an important part of the job market for future archivists
- community archives a very good pretext for discussing social roles of archives and introducing critical archival science
- the topic is fashionable and attractive to students, allowing them to get personally involved in the idea of grassroots collecting projects

FURTHER QUESTIONS

- Should we talk more (locally and internationally) about teaching about community archives? Are the challenges defined here to any extent universal? What are other teachers' challenges?
- Do we need some common solutions or teaching tools? (e.g., lessons scenarios, manuals, general syllabi, educational aids)
- Is there any need and room for discussion in the archival community?

From above:

1. Pins from the Citizen Archive of Podkowa Leśna.
 2. Storage of photographs in General Elżbieta Zawacka Foundation, Toruń.
 3. Photographs from the archive of History Tellers from the Lower Town in Gdańsk.
 4. Old boxes for negatives at the Archeology of Photography Foundation, Warsaw.
 5. A photo from the archive of the Society of Biskupia Górka, Gdańsk.
- All photographs by the author.