

Archival description in Polish community archives: Three examples from a multiple case study

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The article presents detailed description of methods of arrangement and description of archival materials in three community archives from Poland: the Foundation of General Elżbieta Zawacka, the Association “History Tellers from the Lower City in Gdańsk”, and the Civic Archive in Podkowa Leśna. Information presented in the article are part of a research project entitled “Community archives in Poland: multiple case study” (2016–2019). Research data was collected during field studies, using methods of semi-structured interviews, on-site direct observations, and desk research. The article also provides information about the context of operation of contemporary community archives in Poland, especially the phenomenon of professionalization of community archives and its impact on methods of their archival work. As a key finding, the study stresses the importance of knowing the community archive’s context in understanding its archival practices.

Keywords: Community archives, independent archives, archival processing, archival description

1. Introduction

The term “community archive” has been defined in the English-language scientific literature numerous times, not without problems (for example, Flinn, 2007; Flinn, 2011; Newman, 2011; Gilliland & Flinn, 2013; Caswell, 2014; Flinn, 2015; Welland, 2015; Vukliš & Gilliland, 2016; Sheffield, 2017). Recently, authors of two articles have attempted to summarize the current scholarship in the field of community archives, including their definitions.

Welland and Cossham (2019) notice, that ‘community archive’ is a nebulous, umbrella term, used and understood differently, according to author’s discipline or sector, and their origin (in academia or practice). Welland and Cossham managed to indicate four themes raised by the literature which could be useful in describing community archives character: “Firstly, community archives have active community support and participation by a self-defined community. (...) Secondly, community archives are places (physical or otherwise) that validate and provide access to community memory and the stories that may be created from it (...). Thirdly, community archives contain not only archives as traditionally understood but also a variety of items that traditionally have not been considered archival (...). Fourthly, community archives usually operate without direct government funding and/or control (...)” (Welland & Cossham, 2019, unpagged).

Alex Poole (2020) in his literature review on the information work of community archives also addresses their definitions. Poole, as authors before him, notices that the term ‘community’ is problematic, definitions presented by scholars are elastic and promiscuous, and they may vary across geographic and cultural contexts. (p. 4). Poole stresses that, apart from different organizational forms, “community archives show varying degrees of independence and affiliation. Depending upon their geopolitical context, they may overlap with or comprise part of public libraries, local history museums, historical societies, and art galleries, participatory or do-it-yourself (DIY) archives, postcolonial archives, memory groups, oral history initiatives, virtual communities, independent or autonomous archives, ethnic archives, activist archives, ethnocultural collections, religious and spiritual orders’ archives, First Nations organizations, leisure clubs, and mainstream academic institutions” (pp. 4–5). This literature review also shows, that community archives blur the lines between stakeholders (e.g. archivists, volunteers, community members, researchers), and that community archives value much broader set of materials, not only traditional records (pp. 6–9; which strongly corroborates with Welland and Cossham, 2019). Poole also stresses that community archives “relate immanently to social, cultural, and political activism directed toward social justice outcomes” (p. 13), and direct their activities backward (toward the documentary gaps, as well as revisioning the past), and forward (as part of the social justice activism) (pp. 14–16). Based on extensive review of English-language literature, Poole lists variety of interests of community archives, e.g. postcolonialism; race, ethnicity, or nationality; indigenous, aboriginal, formerly enslaved, marginalized, and oppressed peoples; feminists; LGBTQ+ community (pp. 15–17).

Challenges posed by understanding the term and characteristics of community archives have been described also by Polish scholars (for example, Czarnota, 2011; Ziętał, 2012b; Czarnota, 2013; Wiśniewska, 2013; Ziętał, 2014a; Ziętał, 2014b; Wiśniewska, 2015). The term “archiwum społeczne” has been in use since 1990s (Gluza, 2002) and it is not hundred percent equivalent to “community archive”, but might be translated to “social archive” – where the word “społeczne” (“social”) means: relating to society or a part of it; created by society and shared by it; designed to serve the public; working selflessly and voluntarily for the good of some community; organized by some community independently, without the participation of the state (Słownik języka polskiego PWN, 2020).

Polish scholars still struggle with defining the term; usually, instead of creating definitions, they describe some common characteristics of endeavors they believe to be community archives. Among those features most frequently listed are: grass-roots character (for example, Ziętał, 2012b; Wiśniewska, 2013; Czarnota, 2014; Wiśniewska, 2014; Ziętał, 2014a; Giziński, 2016; Wiśniewska-Drewniak, 2019); non-state character, usually associated with non-governmental organizations (for example, Ziętał 2012b; Wiśniewska, 2013; Czarnota, 2013); intention of long term (instead of temporary) preservation of collected materials (Czarnota, 2011; Wiśniewska, 2014;

Ziętał, 2014a; Wiśniewska-Drewniak, 2019); social and civic motivations of the archive's activity (Czarnota, 2014; Ziętał, 2014a; Wiśniewska, 2015).

For purposes of the study, in correspondence with Polish academic traditions of understanding this term, I described community archives as independent, grass-roots initiatives enduring to ensure ongoing preservation of archival materials (or at least those that believe their materials deserve long-term preservation), often housed by non-governmental organizations, but also by informal groups and, in some cases, private individuals. Thus, archives considered for the study were not part of any state or local government structures, and their holdings consisted of original archival materials (at least in some part).

The aim of the article is presenting models of archival description implemented by three community archives studied as part of a research project entitled "Community archives in Poland – multiple case study" (2016–2019). Due to increasing interest of academia in the subject of independent archiving endeavors (Czarnota, 2017) and a substantial gap in knowledge about how particular community archives operate on a daily basis, the project was designed as a descriptive multiple case study, in order to answer its main (and very general) research question: how do contemporary Polish community archives operate? This question consisted of a number of sub-questions about these archives, among others: what are the reasons for creating community archives? What are the characteristics of their collections? How do they collect, preserve, process, and provide access to their archival materials? What activities do these archives organize? Who does work in these archives and on what terms? How are community archives funded? What are the problems and future plans of these archives?

A special place in this myriad of detailed research questions was occupied by a question about arrangement and description of materials in community archives. The reason for that is my personal interest in the subject of archival processing, as well as a rich Polish tradition of and special emphasis put on this process in historical archives (Kwiatkowska, 2014). Another reason is contemporary interest in supporting community archives in their day-to-day operations, including archival processing. This support is provided especially by the KARTA Center – the biggest community archive in Poland and a hub in the network of Polish community archives, as well as their informal ambassador.

2. KARTA and community archives landscape in Poland

It is essential to describe, apart from each case, the context in which Polish community archives currently operate – especially the context of support and particular tools provided for community archivists in last several years. This landscape of community archives in Poland influences not only results of the study, their perception and understanding by readers, but it also had significant impact on the character of the study, research questions, research methods choosing, even cases selected for the

study. Thus, this context will be briefly presented in the paper even before research methodology and data collection.

The most significant part of the landscape of community archives in Poland is the KARTA Center in Warsaw. KARTA is a non-governmental organization (foundation) and the biggest community archive in Poland. KARTA started as an independent, under-cover publishing project in early 1980s, legalized its activity in 1990, after the political turn in Poland, when the communist government ceased to exist. KARTA's vast collections of archival materials, acquired mostly from private individuals, contain paper records, photographs, grey literature, ephemera, diaries, oral history recordings, that cover contemporary history of Poland and Eastern Europe, especially experiences of Nazism and Communism (Gluza, 2012). Since the beginning of the 21st century KARTA has been engaging in supporting and empowering grass-roots archival initiatives. Firstly, in years 2002–2004 and 2007–2008, as part of the Community Archives Council organized at the Chief Directorate of State Archives (the council eventually failed due to lack of funding) (Jóźwik, 2017); later, since 2012, as part of a set of KARTA's own programs aimed at community archives. These projects comprised of, among others, publishing manuals for community archivists (Ziętal, 2012a; Świątecka, 2017), setting up a database of community archives in Poland and Polish community archives abroad (www.archiwa.org/archives), organizing three Congresses of Community Archives (in 2015, 2017, and 2019), and providing a variety of courses, webinars, and workshops responding to needs of community archivists. A significant part of training opportunities and materials offered by KARTA touches methods of archival arrangement and description. These practices are based on official, scientific methods described in literature, as well as, to some extent, in internal regulations used in state historical archives, and international standards of archival description. Up to date, over 600 people took part in training opportunities provided by KARTA. For 2019 KARTA plans starting an e-learning platform for community archivists (*Szkolenia internetowe dla archiwistów społecznych*, n.d.).

The most significant tool supporting community archives descriptive practices is the Open System for Archiving (OSA – Otwarty System Archiwizacji) provided by the KARTA Center. OSA is a web-based, open-source application for describing archival materials and providing access to them, as well as to their description online. The system also provides a database of archival descriptions published by all archives using OSA. The system is based on standards of the International Council on Archives: ISAD (G), ISDIAH, and ISAAR (CPF) (*Otwarty System Archiwizacji*, n.d.).

Even though the landscape of community archives in Poland is recently dominated by KARTA, initiatives originated in Gdańsk should also be mentioned. In the northern part of Poland support for community archivists is also provided by two cooperating non-governmental organizations: a foundation that is also a community archive (Fundacja im. Stanisława Flisa “Archiwa Pomorskie”) and a local branch of professional association of archivists (Stowarzyszenie Archiwistów Polskich Oddział w Gdańsku); both organizations are situated in Gdańsk. Between 2016 and 2019 they

organized several conferences and workshops for local non-professional archivists – some of them focused on methods of archival processing (*Warsztaty archiwalne dla gdańskich archiwistów społecznych, prywatnych i rodzinnych*, 2018; *Zakończenie cyklu warsztatów archiwalnych*, 2019).

Currently, KARTA's activity and methods are very popular among community archivists. KARTA's popularity in this group has been built for many years of engagement in the cause of supporting community archives in Poland, by organizing many KARTA's own, but publicly funded projects, but also through acting as an advocate of community archives and archivists, constantly in touch with state administration. Several hundreds of community archivists who took part in KARTA's training, manuals published by KARTA, and Open System for Archiving (OSA) now used by around 70 archival projects, highly impact practices of community archives. Previous, in-house methods of archival arrangement and description are increasingly eroding, making vernacular archival practices, which 10 years ago were defining independent archives, much more difficult to access and study.

Because of this phenomenon of unifying archival practices of community archives in Poland, in order to capture these eroding, idiosyncratic archival practices, the research project described in this article was focused on archives which do not use KARTA's methods and tools, including OSA, in their everyday archival work. Due to that specific moment in the community archives movement in Poland, the study has a descriptive character – in order to grasp and record disappearing in-home methods used by archives studied as part of the project. This also provided a proper level of diversity of recorded archival practices. These descriptions, in forms of case reports, are supposed to not only serve for purposes of this particular research project, but also for future researchers (case reports were published in full versions, in open access). Even before completing the study, focus on the descriptive character of reports turned out to be a good decision. Shortly after, three of eight community archives I had visited, switched (fully or partially) to using OSA instead of their previous tools and methods of archival processing. This shows how important it was to study and describe these archives at this particular moment, but it also explains the rather high number of cases studied during the project. In order to describe and record as many examples of vernacular archival practices, the research project included eight case studies – the highest number of cases which, in the author's opinion, could be described during the course of the project and author's doctoral studies.

Due to the limitations related to the volume of a scientific article, it was impossible to describe here all eight examined archives, even if the article would contain only information on their arrangement and description practices. That is why I decided to choose and describe only three archives of eight examined. Their selection was planned to provide diversity and contrast of cases, in terms of size of archival holdings, their thematic and formal characteristic, and age of the archive. Moreover, all the archives presented below share one feature that stood out very clearly throughout the project in terms of general conclusions about the approach to studying community archives. This feature is a significant meaning of the context of the archive and

its history and their importance in learning and understanding community archives practices.

3. Materials and methods

The project was funded by the National Science Center in Kraków and had a character of basic research. The implemented strategy was multiple descriptive case study. The main objective of the project was creating contextual description of cases (Strumińska-Kutra & Kołodkiewicz, 2012) in order to generate new knowledge about contemporary Polish community archives. The case study method was chosen because it is frequently referred to as a method that can be used with good results for studying phenomena that are not well known. Moreover, the method works well for research questions starting with “how?” and “why?”, especially for study of contemporary phenomena (in the contrary to historical ones), which the author intends to describe in a wide and in-depth manner (Eisenhardt, 1989; Strumińska-Kutra & Kołodkiewicz, 2012; Yin, 2015).

A multiple case study approach was taken because of previously mentioned lack of knowledge about Polish community archives (a need to describe as many archives as possible) and possibilities presented by generous funding from a research agency. The final number of cases was eight; usually, the literature suggests a number between four and ten (Eisenhardt, 1989; Czakon, 2006), although Stake (2006) suggests that under some circumstances this number can be either reduced, or increased.

The archives that inform this multiple case study are:

1. Cyfrowe Archiwum Łodzian Miastograf.pl (Digital Archive of Łódź Citizens Miastograf.pl)
2. Bronowickie Archiwum Społeczne (Community Archive in Bronowice)
3. Archiwum Południowo-Wschodniego Instytutu Naukowego w Przemyślu (Archive of the Southeast Scientific Institute in Przemyśl)
4. Fundacja Generał Elżbiety Zawackiej. Archiwum i Muzeum Pomorskie Armii Krajowej oraz Wojskowej Służby Polek (The Foundation of General Elżbieta Zawacka. Archive and Museum of the Home Army and Polish Women Military Service)
5. Archiwum Stowarzyszenia “Opowiadacze Historii Dolnego Miasta w Gdańsku” (Archive of Association “History Tellers from the Lower City in Gdańsk”)
6. Obywatelskie Archiwum Podkowy Leśnej (Civic Archive in Podkowa Leśna)
7. Archiwum Fundacji Archeologia Fotografii (Archive of Archeology of Photography Foundation)
8. Klub Historyczny LGBTQIA Fem (LGBTQIA Fem History Club)

Archives 4, 5, and 6 are addressed below in the article, in the results section.

Cases were selected using the method of purposive sampling (information-oriented selection), to assure the maximum variation (Flyvbjerg, 2006) in order to present

description of a variety of community archives that, at least to some extent, could be a representation of the highly differentiated phenomenon of grass-roots archiving. Emphasis in case selection was put mainly on providing contrastable, rather than comparable cases. This corresponds to the descriptive nature of the study. The selection was understood mostly in terms of variety of their archival holdings (characteristics taken into account during selection: big/small holdings; digital/analogue/mixed materials; prevalence of photographs/oral histories/textual records/mixed materials). Moreover, age of particular archival endeavors was also taken into account (the oldest archive studied had been set up in the 1960s, the youngest was less than two years old in the moment of the visit), as well as subjects documented by the archives. The strategy of maximizing variety in case selection in community archives studies was previously implemented by Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd (2009), Wakimoto, Bruce, Partridge (2013), and Welland (2015).

The main characteristic of the project lies in the field method of inquiry, that is very atypical for research in the archival discipline in Poland, where archival science is still commonly seen as an auxiliary science of history and is exercised mostly by professional historians. Moreover, education in archival studies and records management in Poland does not provide students with proper knowledge about social sciences methods of inquiry, which could be very useful for studying archives and records-keeping, not only on academic level, but also as part of preparing bachelor's and master's dissertations. Due to that, the project's secondary objective (apart from community archives description), was implementation of a method common in the social sciences to a humanities-based field, and providing a detailed description of the research process in a monograph concluding the project. The research protocol described there can be used many times, by other researchers, and after necessary changes may be useful for a variety of research topics.

My field visits in each archive lasted between one and four days. Research data were collected using face-to-face semi-structured interviews, on-site observations, and desk research (based on sources like, among others, scientific literature, the KARTA Centre's database of community archives, finding aids, organization's reports, websites, social media accounts, mass media entries, official records concerning funding from public sources). Each field study was preceded by preliminary studies based on desk research method and sources available prior to the visit in the archive.

The author had no previous relationship with the archives studied during the project (outsider position). Contact was initiated via e-mail, which included introductory information about the research and the researcher, in order to assure informed consent for participation in the study and build trust between the researcher and participants (e.g. research objectives and focus, funding information, academic background).

Special emphasis in this project was put on interviews, because they contained valuable, first-hand information inaccessible otherwise, as well as the context of the particular archive and landscape in which it operated. During my visits, I interviewed especially the "main archivist" – a person who carried out most of the archival work – this strategy was used also by Sarah Welland in her study of community archives in

New Zealand (2015). In the course of the study it turned out that in bigger archives the “main archivist” did not possess knowledge about wider context of the archive organization, like funding or future plans. The “main archivists” also had different views on problems of the archive. Due to that, in some cases, I interviewed also a “decisive person” of the archive (head of foundation/association). Interviews were recorded in audio format and then transcribed into textual format. Observations, concentrated on storage and infrastructure (especially for providing access to archival materials on-site), were documented using digital photography and notes.

After the visit the data were prepared for further analysis – interviews were transcribed, photographs described, notes re-written, and textual sources organized and described. Then, information from all types of sources were put together and coded in a qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA). Codes used in this process were *a priori* codes based on a tree of detailed research questions (Saldaña, 2009; Creswell, 2013). In this phase, data were reduced and compared (special attention was put to data describing the same subject that originated in different sources). Data analysis on the case level was concluded by creating a detailed case report, organized in a tabular form inspired by the British study on impact of community archives carried out in 2006–2007 (Community Archives Development Group, 2007b; sample report: CADG, 2007a). Then, each case report was sent to the interviewee(s) as part of the member checking strategy. After obtaining acceptance from the archive, I published the report (with short introduction about the whole research project) on-line, in my university repository (Wiśniewska-Drewniak, 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d; 2019).

After all case studies, I carried out cross-case analysis, based on case reports generated in previous stages of the study. This type of analysis was based on organizing data from different cases according to one scheme. The scheme was a set of particular research questions (e.g. How does the archive collect archival materials? What are the archive’s plans for the future?), which also dictated the shape of case report on previous stages of the research. But during the cross-case analysis the questions were summarized for all cases described previously (e.g. How do all eight archives collect archival materials? What are all eight archives plans for the future?). The goal of such generalization was creating a so called “rich insight” (Walsham, 1995), as well as the preliminary recognition of patterns and posing further research questions for subsequent research. Account has been taken of the fact that, in multiple case studies, cases do not form fully comparable data sets. Each case has its own rules and a separate narrative. It is a mistake to simply sum up the similarities and differences between the cases, apart from the context (Strumińska-Kutra & Kołodkiewicz, 2012). The generalization generated at the end of the research procedure was a type of a reporting generalization (also called empirical generalization), i.e. one whose validity concerns the examined reality only and cannot be simply applied to cases outside the examined pool (Ryszewski, 1985). This low level of generalization, aimed at building “rich insight” and further research questions, rather than answering general, theoretical questions about a phenomenon of community archiving in Poland, was dictated by

the state of knowledge about Polish community archives, as well as development in archival discipline in Poland. The emphasis in the research project was on generating new knowledge about community archives and designing a research protocol for empirical study of archives, and usability of those two for future research.

4. Results

4.1. *The Foundation of General Elżbieta Zawacka*

Foundation of General Elżbieta Zawacka: the Pomeranian Archive and Museum of the Home Army and Women's Military Service (Polish: Fundacja General Elżbiety Zawackiej: Archiwum i Muzeum Pomorskie Armii Krajowej oraz Wojskowej Służby Polek) was formally created in 1990 in Toruń (although, with a different name). But this independent archive was initiated as early as the 1960s by General Elżbieta Zawacka, a former soldier of the Home Army – Polish underground military forces formed during the World War II. The archive collects materials concerning three topics: history of the Home Army and conspiracy in Pomerania (northern part of Poland); history of Polish women in military service on every front of the World War II; history of the International Communication Department of the Home Army. The archive comprises of written and oral testimonies of former soldiers of various military organizations, photographs, records of underground organizations, copies and excerpts from materials in other archives. The foundation owns also numerous museum objects and a vast library. Currently, the Foundation of General Elżbieta Zawacka is the second largest community archive in Poland.

A special objective of General Zawacka and later the foundation, was creating a biographical dictionary of war conspirators in Pomerania; the collecting endeavors of the archive were aimed at this direction. It is important to stress, that from the very beginning, General Zawacka and her assistants wanted to document history of all Pomeranian conspirators, not only distinguished individuals (Zawacka, 1990).

I visited the archive in September 2017 and conducted three interviews: with Elżbieta Skerska (matters of the Pomeranian Archive), with Anna Rojewska (matters of the archives of Polish women in military service), and with Dorota Zawacka-Wakarecy (general matters of the organization, funding, future plans). During my visits in the foundation seat I also conducted observations of the storage spaces, reading rooms, and an exhibition room. In the seat of the foundation I also used the organization's own records (reports, lists of queries), finding aids, publications and ephemera issued by the foundation, as well as archival materials. Apart from that, desk research was supported by, among others, scientific literature and published finding aids, foundation's statute and annual reports, the organization's website and social media accounts. The case report was accepted by the informants in January 2018 and published on-line in March 2018 (Wiśniewska-Drewniak, 2018a).

The foundation collects archival materials (and copies of archival materials from other archives), museum objects, and library items. Due to a special interest of the study in archival objects' arrangement and description, only the first type of objects will be described in this article.

The foundation acquires archival materials primarily as effect of their workers' activity and contacts with particular war veterans and their families, as well as with institutions and researchers engaged in studying topics similar to the archive's interests. The founder of the archive, Elżbieta Zawacka, described their collecting activity in the following way: "Our Archive, and I would like to call it 'a living archive', establishes and maintains intensive mail and personal contacts with potential donors of archival materials. We do not wait for the materials to come to us, but we force it with significant persistence – and that provides good results" (Zawacka, 2001, p. 15). Some extensive parts of the archival holdings are a result of donations from other non-governmental organizations (e.g. pre-war photographs from the Women History Commission; several hundreds of personal dossiers from local branches of the World Association of Home Army Soldiers).

All archival materials are arranged into the following sections and sub-sections:

I. the Pomeranian Archives of the Home Army

1. files of the Pomeranian District of the Union of Armed Struggle – Home Army (Polish: Okręg Pomorski Związku Walki Zbrojnej – Armii Krajowej) – the collection was deposited in the State Archive in Toruń and there arranged and described by a state archivist; 17 files;
2. files of the Secret Military Organization "Pomeranian Griffin" (Polish: "Gryf Pomorski") – the collection has not been processed;
3. personal dossiers of Pomeranian conspirators – the biggest and most important part of the Pomeranian archives division; the files are arranged into fourteen groups: with accordance to the Home Army Pomeranian District into nine territorial inspectorates, and five more parts: the District Headquarters and the heads of other organizations, the District Government Delegation, Pomeranian partisans – commanders, Pomeranian Silent Unseen, Pomeranians involved in conspiracy outside Pomerania; this part of the archive consists of over 2700 dossiers (state for November 2017);
4. a group of 15 collections and personal archives donated by professional or amateur researchers and local branches of the World Association of Home Army Soldiers; the materials are not fully processed; collectively, this group contains 5 meters of files;

II. the Archive of the Wartime Service of Women

1. Organization of the Military Training of Women (Polish: Organizacja Przyniesienia Wojskowego Kobiet) – materials from the pre-war period and first years after the WWII, collected by General Elżbieta Zawacka and General Maria Wittek; the materials are not processed;

2. personal dossiers of female soldiers – personal files of female soldiers of the Home Army and other underground organizations, as well as soldiers in the Army of General Anders and Army of General Berling; this group contains over 4650 dossiers (state for November 2017).

III. Archive of the Foreign Communication Department of the Headquarters of the Union of Armed Struggle – Home Army “Zagroda” – personal dossiers of 259 soldiers of “Zagroda”, arranged alphabetically.

In each archive’s division the most important part are personal dossiers, but each division uses a different set of finding aids. Especially important type of finding aids are card catalogues. It is not possible to establish the exact reason for using card catalogues in this archive – General Zawacka started this method probably as early as in the 1960s. One feature of this type of finding aid that should be considered is that a card catalogue can be easily supplemented or cards can be easily replaced, which can be crucial for the archive which permanently processes its holdings, and constantly acquires new materials.

The Pomeranian archive uses seven different types of card catalogues. The alphabetical catalogue (so called “alfabetka”) contains alphabetically arranged cards with family names. Each card enlists every person documented by the archive, who holds this family name. For each person the card enlists basic information like first name, other used family names (esp. for women), nicknames, place of birth or operation, name of organization, sometimes a profession or other characteristics. If the card provides also an archival identifying number, this means that the person has got a separate personal dossier in the archive, as well as a card in the informants catalogue. If a person used more than one family name (e.g. maiden name and husband’s family name), the catalogue enlists this person under each of these names – with proper reference.

The informants catalogue contains information about soldiers who have a personal dossier in the Pomeranian archive. Each card describes a separate person. The following information is enlisted: dossiers identification number, organization and its division in which the person served during the war, names and nicknames (with one plus next to it meaning the persons died during the war, and with two pluses – after the war), number of the Home Army’s Cross card, contact data to the person or his/her family, and if applicable, information about the person’s death.

The biggest catalogue of the Pomeranian archive is comprised of so called information cards (Polish: “kartoteka informacyjna”) stored alphabetically, divided according to the structure of the Pomeranian Division of the Home Army. Information cards are bibliographical excerpts from various sources about life and activity of conspirators. If the person has a separate dossier in the archive, the information cards about this person are placed in the dossier and the catalogue is supplemented with so-called aggregated card.

The aggregated cards are two-sided. The first side contains the following information: name, dossier’s identifier, military rank, nicknames, parents’ names, mother’s

maiden name, addresses, division, specification, military organization, other names, maiden name, date and place of birth, date and place of death, sources and other information. The other side of the card contains six fields: activity during the Great War, activity in pre-war organizations, engagement in the defense war in September 1939; date and place of joining the organization, promoter and the person receiving the oath; allocation and commanding officers; functions and activities; arrests, incarcerations, death; medals, membership in veterans organizations.

The archive also uses the catalogue of nicknames, catalogue of code names and symbols and catalogue of abbreviations. The last type of catalogue used by the Pomeranian archive is a subject catalogue, composed of cards with subject entry (e.g. "the Catholic Action", "mass executions 1939", "Gestapo – seats, reports"). Cards contain short information about the entry and, in some cases, identification numbers of dossiers.

The Archive of the Wartime Service of Women also uses the alphabetical catalogue and the information catalogue similar to the ones used by the Pomeranian archive. The alphabetical catalogue contains all data collected by the foundation about female soldiers – not only those who are documented by particular personal dossiers, but also those described in different sources. The information catalogue (Polish "kartoteka informacyjna"), similar to its equivalent in the Pomeranian archive, comprises of both standardized and not standardized cards. The cards are arranged in 26 groups; 15 of them correspond to territorial division of the Home Army; the rest are: no territorial affiliation, no organizational affiliation, the Government Delegation, the Polish People's Army, the Military Training of Women – District Silesia, other organizations, female prisoners of the occupation period, female prisoners after 1945, others.

A very interesting aspect of the foundation's archival description is a system of identification numbers used for personal dossiers.

A sample number in the Pomeranian archive is "K-166/166 Pom." for a woman and "M-279/888 Pom." for a man, where the letter at the beginning indicates the informant's gender, the first number indicates the dossier's position as part of the gender group, the second number its position in the whole Pomeranian archive, and the abbreviation "Pom." is a symbol of the particular part of the foundation holdings.

The Archive of the Wartime Service of Women uses identifiers like "882/WSK", where the number indicates the position of the dossier in this archive division, and the abbreviation "WSK" stands for the name of this division. Because this division comprises of materials concerning only women soldiers, the identification number does not contain indication of the soldier's gender.

Personal dossiers in the archive of "Zagroda" are identified by numbers like, for example "12-K/Zagr.", "178- M/Zagr." The number at the beginning stands for the position of the dossier in this archive, the letter K or M stands for the conspirator's gender, and "Zagr." is a symbol of the particular part of the foundation holdings.

If a personal dossier comprising materials about one person is so vast that it cannot be contained in one folder, the materials are divided into more folders but they share the same identification number.

All personal dossiers are described on their covers in a similar manner, regardless of the division to which they are affiliated. The cover description contains the following elements: information about the foundation (a stamp), in some cases a stamp “scanned”, name of the person with one plus next to it meaning the person died during the war, and with two pluses – after the war, organization and territory of activity, nicknames, dossier’s identification number, contact details of the veteran or his/her family. Sometimes the cover contains also information about archival processing, for example changing the folder, previous identification number, or who arranged and described the dossier.

All three archives within the foundation use the same rules of arranging materials within personal dossiers. The materials are divided into the following groups and subgroups:

- I/1 Testimony (written testimonies, biographies)
- I/2 Documents (*sensu stricto*) about the informant (e.g. school report cards, witnesses’ testimonies, work certificates, medal cards), records generally related to the occupation period
- I/3 Other materials about the informant
- II Materials supplementing the testimony (e.g. articles, obituaries, memories that are not testimonies)
- III/1 Materials about the informant’s family
- III/2 Materials generally concerning the period before 1939
- III/3 Materials generally concerning the occupation period 1939–1945
- III/4 Materials generally concerning the period after 1945
- III/5 Others
- IV Correspondence
- V Information cards (from the information catalogue)
- VI Photographs

The list presented above is glued to the inside of the dossier’s cover and supplemented with information about pages of each group; this list serves as a content list.

Particular parts of the dossier are kept in separate sleeves. Each sleeve has a list of materials kept inside (description on the level of particular documents). The list contains the name of the group and name of the informant, number of documents, title and date, form (e.g. manuscript, typescript), number of cards and pages. In each sleeve, materials are arranged chronologically and pages are numbered as part of a particular sleeve. The number of the page situated in the upper-right corner, is composed of both symbol of the group and number of the page, for example “III/2/1” stands for the first page in the group of materials generally concerning the period before 1939.

Photographs from the Pomeranian archive are stored in a separate box in different types of envelopes; information about this fact is written down on the dossiers cover. Each envelope usually keeps photographs from one informant. The description on the

envelopes is not standardized, but usually contains information like name, codename, identification number, organization and affiliation, short description/title and dates. Some photographs are described on their back side, either by their owners, or by archivists. In some cases the description is made by many hands and one cannot differentiate who authored this description.

In the Archive of the Wartime Service of Women photographs about female soldiers are placed within personal dossiers, in envelopes. The envelope is usually described with the following information: name of the informant, identification number, and a list of photographs inside (title of the photo, date, information whether it is a negative or reproduction, sometimes size of the photograph). Some photographs are placed in a sheet of paper or cardboard, cut especially for the photograph, usually with description of the photograph on it. This description occurs in various forms and is not standardized. Similarly to the Pomeranian archive, some photographs are described on their back sides.

The system of archival arrangement and description used by the General Elżbieta Zawacka Foundation was described in foundation's internal regulation entitled: "Instruction for processing personal files." The first version of the instruction was created in the middle 1990's and has been amended since then. The instruction regulates the following aspects: arrangement of records in personal dossiers and division of those records into groups (sleeves); description of particular documents on those sleeves; description of the dossier's content and cover; template of the information card; list of keywords for subject catalogue; template of the alphabetical card; list of abbreviations (especially used for names of military organizations).

The General Elżbieta Zawacka Foundation created its own information system for its specific archival holdings. The system was created in some part by Elżbieta Zawacka, the creator of the archive, even before the formal establishment of the organization. The most important part of the system, and generally the defining characteristic of the archives, is a special emphasis on particular persons. Thus, main information aids used in the foundation are personal indexes (in the form of card catalogues). The system is complicated and difficult to use. It is composed of many separate parts – different types of catalogues that vary according to part of archival holdings they describe. Efficient use of this system by users needs to be assisted by employees of the foundation. Finding aids have a traditional paper form. One must use multiple catalogues in order to find answer to some queries (for example when a user knows only a conspirator's nickname, he/she will have to use the nicknames catalogue in order to continue the search for further information in the alphabetical or information catalogue). This process could be simplified by transferring archival description into an electronic system, but this endeavor would require significant funding and enormous labor input, not only to transfer the data into computers, but also to design the system for the specific arrangement of archival holdings.

4.2. *The association "History Tellers from the Lower City in Gdańsk"*

The Association "History Tellers from the Lower City in Gdańsk" (Polish: Stowarzyszenie "Opowiadacze Historii Dolnego Miasta w Gdańsku") was formally set

up in 2014, but the group had operated already in 2010. The Tellers document the past and present of the Lower City – one of districts of Gdańsk. They frequently engage in activities to revitalize the neighborhood, to enhance its image. They aim at rebuilding and shaping local patriotism, reviving social, cultural, and economic life, developing the idea of civil society. Members of the association record reminiscences about the neighborhood, collect copies of photographs from family albums, buy postcards and pre-war photographs of the Lower City. Materials collected by the archive especially document everyday life, traditions and local myths, architecture and atmosphere of the Lower City, lives of ordinary people – aspects, that are not connected with the “big”, political history, prominent individuals, and important, distant institutions (Wiśniewska-Drewniak 2018b).

I visited the archive in January 2018 and conducted an interview with Jacek Górski – president of the association and the “main archivist”. The archive, although believed to be owned by the local community, is currently stored in Górski’s apartment. During my visit, I also conducted observations of the storage spaces and techniques. Desk research was based on the association’s website and social media channels, press information and publications issued by the organization. The case report was accepted by Górski and published online in February 2018 (Wiśniewska-Drewniak, 2018b).

Due to the local character of the archive, the History Tellers acquire materials mostly using their personal contacts. Some contacts were initiated through social media. Jacek Górski also used old phone books and small ads from old newspapers to establish relations with contemporary or former inhabitants of the neighborhood.

The association does not have a catalogue of the whole archive, so it is not easy to estimate its size. At a rough estimate the association keeps between 50 and 60 audio recordings of interviews, several thousands of contemporary photographs, original traditional photographs (over 100 pre-war photographs including around 50 photographs from photo shops situated in the Lower City, and several dozens of photographs taken by members of the Neighbourhood Committee from the 1970s and 1980s), around 200 postcards, over 1000 copies of traditional photographs, around 100 paper textual records, several maps and between 60 and 70 audio and video recordings of meetings organized by the organization.

The archive is not formally divided into any parts, because most of the materials are not described or enlisted in any way. According to manners of storage, as well as the informal division suggested by the interviewee, Jacek Górski, the holdings can be divided into the following groups and subgroups:

- interviews
- post-war photographs
 - * copies of family photographs acquired for inhabitants of the Lower City
 - * current photographs of the neighbourhood (original, digital)
- pre-war photographs (original)
 - * from photo shops situated in the Lower City
 - * others

- post cards (originals)
- ephemera (packagings, stickers, flyers)
- paper records
 - * correspondence
 - * headed paper and envelopes
 - * maps
- library materials (copies)
 - * articles and small ads about the Lower City
 - * advertisements
- museum objects

Archival description of this community archive is very limited. Only interviews are described in an electronic finding aid containing the following data: interviewer's name, interview date, interviewee's name, duration and file name. The information regarding names of interviewer and interviewee, date, place and circumstances of the interview are also recorded at the beginning or end of each audio file.

For some time the History Tellers have been running an electronic catalogue of photographs which contained name of the donor, title of the photograph, its date (if known) and keywords. The catalogue comprised description of around 200–300 objects. After some time, due to high time consumption of the process, the association stopped creating new entries and the catalogue itself got lost.

Other materials are not described in any type of catalogue or inventory. Due to the small size of the holdings, the president of the association (who is also the main archivist) precisely knows each object from the archive. On the other hand, Górski admitted that the association would benefit from having a detailed inventory of the archival materials. This could be useful especially in order to find materials from a specific date so they can be presented online on the anniversary of their creation (as part of the History Tellers regularly published series of articles).

4.3. Civic Archive in Podkowa Leśna

The Civic Archive in Podkowa Leśna (Polish: Obywatelskie Archiwum Podkowy Leśnej) is a part of a local society in Podkowa Leśna, a small town situated near Warsaw. The society has pre-war traditions, but it was reactivated in the late 1980s. The archive was set up as a separate entity within the organization in 2009. Podkowa Leśna, a peaceful town in Warsaw metropolitan area, was located in 1925, as an expression of the urban and social idea of garden-cities. In the 1970s and 1980s Podkowa Leśna was an important center of the anti-communist opposition. The archive owns pre-war materials of the society, as well as post-war materials concerning the democratic opposition and history of the local parish. The aim of the archive is to care for development of the town and reminiscences of its history, as well as building local identity in a town inseparably connected to and dependent on the capital city.

I visited the archive in January 2018 and conducted two interviews: with Bogdan Wróblewski (one of coordinators of the archive) and with Bogdan Wróblewski and Jacek Wojnarowski (the president of the society). During my visit in the society seat, I also conducted observations of the storage space and reading rooms. Desk research was supported by, among others, finding aids, society's website, statute and reports as well as official records concerning funding from public sources. The case report was accepted by the participants and published on-line in February 2018 (Wiśniewska-Drewniak, 2018c).

Part of the archive that has been processed is divided into five archival fonds/collections:

- I. the archive of the Society of Friends of Garden-City Podkowa Leśna until 1939 (dates: [1926–1929] 1930–1939 [1942]; identifier PL/1007/001) – 33 folders of records documenting activity of the society preceding the contemporary organisation;
- II. collection “Independent Podkowa” (dates: [1976–1977] 1979–1989 [1990–1999, 2005], identifier PL/1007/002) – records of activity of anticommunist opposition in Podkowa Leśna assembled by the local parish priest; the collection comprises of 63 folders and is divided into 3 series: activity of political opposition and catholic church in Poland in the 1970s and 1980s, activity of the Parish Committee of Mutual Help and non-textual records;
- III. the Civic Committee “Solidarity” in Podkowa Leśna (dates: 1989–1990, identifier PL/1007/003) – a small fonds (6 folders) documenting a local structure of “Solidarity”;
- IV. collection of priest Leon Kantorski concerning history of St. Christopher's parish and church in Podkowa Leśna (dates: 1930–2005, identifier PL/1007/004) – collection of 49 folders that documents activity of the parish;
- V. Portraits of citizens of Podkowa (dates: 2003–2009 [2010], identifier PL/1007/005) – the collection of 119 photographs by Jacek Maziarski.

The archive comprises of 271 folders (3 meters without the portraits of citizens of Podkowa) and materials that have not been processed yet. The processed part of the archive is described in 5 inventories – one for each fonds/collection. The process of arrangement and description of these materials was funded by the Chief Directorate of State Archives as part of the program “Supporting archival endeavors” – program of financial aid aimed at organizations possessing non-state archival holdings (*Dotacje NDAP*, n.d.). During two editions of the program (2016 and 2017), the society hired a consultant in order to assure professional processing of archival materials. The consultant was an employee of a state archive and imposed on the Civic Archive (not without its resistance) methods of arrangement and description used in the network of state archives. The inventories created in the process comprise the following information:

- introduction to the inventory
- * history of records creator

- * history of the fonds/collection
- * characteristics of the fonds/collection (name, dates, territory, percentage of the original fonds/collection, structure, technical information, physical state, copies)
- * content of the fonds/collection
- * methods of arrangement and description
- list of folders, which contain the following:
 - * identifier
 - * title
 - * translated title
 - * dates
 - * content (length and amount of details dependent on particular fonds/collection and author of the description)
 - * type of records
 - * details (language, access)
 - * physical description (pages, originals/copies, physical character and state)
 - * comments

The identifying symbol for fonds/collections (e.g. “PL/1007/001”) comprises of symbol of the country, number of the archive in the network of community archives set up by the KARTA Center and the number of fonds/collection. Particular folders inside fonds/collections are numbered with Arabic digits starting with 1 for each group.

5. Discussion

As it was mentioned in previous sections, only three out of eight archives studied as part of the research project are described in this article, and the subject of arrangement and description is only a small part of each case study. Due to that, and to the descriptive aim of the whole project, I will restrain from grand generalizations on archival processing in community archives. Nevertheless, some general ideas on researching this topic are, in my opinion, worth sharing.

The aim of the results section was to describe the current practices of community archives in the field of archival arrangement and description. This was dictated by a specific moment for community archives in Poland. As it was mentioned above, the activities of the KARTA Center have a large impact on community archives currently operating in Poland. Due to KARTA’s training courses and especially in connection with the introduction of KARTA’s software for archival description (OSA), the most variable element of archival practice of community archives at this point is arrangement and description of archival materials. This means that many community archives currently give up their original, “home-made” archival methods in favor of using know-how and tools provided to them by the KARTA Center (and in the

north of the country, to some extent, also by the two previously mentioned NGOs in Gdańsk). The pace of these changes is reflected in the numbers: at the end of 2016, 28 organizations used the OSA system; in June 2020 – the number was 72 (Ziętał, 2016; *Open Archiving System*, n.d.). Out of eight archives that I visited during the three years of the project, three archives changed their current methods of archival description to the OSA system shortly after my visit. This means that the case reports generated during the study are now of a historical nature. Due to the great variability of community archives (not only in terms of arrangement and description), the case reports were published in full. The purpose of creating these detailed reports was not so much inferring about the nature of community archives, but to pose further research questions and enable future scholars to access information about how these archives functioned at the time of the research project. (This approach resembles Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge's study of queer community archives in California; Wakimoto et al., 2013).

The outline of the research objective was closely related to the current state of knowledge about community archives in Poland. It is a topic that is quickly gaining interest from the academy and archival authorities (Czarnota, 2017). At the same time, we do not know how to study community archives, because the vast majority of archival scholars in Poland are historians, professionally trained in the study of the past, not the present; first separate university degree curriculum in “archive studies and records management”, not as part of a history curriculum, was inaugurated in 2007. I believe this issue of methodological shortcomings of archival researchers is serious and should be addressed soon, especially by changing university curricula. The fact that archival researchers are usually trained in using historical inquiry methods and not fieldwork was signaled previously by Karen Gracy, writing about archival ethnography (2004, 361). Although this notion was made more than 15 years ago, it still can be related to the current situation in Poland.

A key finding of the study, which is both substantive and methodological in nature, is recognizing the importance of the broader context in understanding arrangement and description in community archives. This observation is similar to Andrew Flinn's general postulates to explore community archives in context (2011). Archival arrangement and descriptive practices may be influenced by archive's history, background, and motivations; the topic or community which the archive documents; ways of collecting archival materials; size of the archive and types/forms of materials collected; activities taken by the archive and uses of its collections. These questions, although not described here in particular, also significantly impact the nature of archival practices in community archives.

Thus, in order to understand archival arrangement and description in community archives, analysis of only finding aids or databases made available by this archive may be insufficient. This research strategy was used by Tomasz Czarnota when analyzing arrangement and description in community archives, including Community Archives in Bronowice (Czarnota, 2016). In my research, which also included the study of this particular community archive, I discovered that such data collection strategy is

ineffective and may lead to erroneous conclusions (Wiśniewska-Drewniak, 2017d). In order to know and, more importantly, understand archival practices of community archives, the desk research method is insufficient and should be supplemented, in particular, with an interview, as well as with providing a general overview of the archive. Research based solely upon archival aids, especially only those available for users, does not provide insight into the archive's particular set of practices, and above all, it does not allow to know the motivations that influenced the use of such methods and tools.

All three cases described in this article show us how important is the archive's context in understanding the archive's practices.

The Foundation of General Elżbieta Zawacka used to motivate its existence by publishing a biographical dictionary of conspirators in Pomerania. This objective (and, in general, directing the foundation's activities towards writing the history of people, not institutions) influenced the way the collections were divided into personal dossiers and the internal order of documents inside the dossiers. The topics documented by the archive have also changed over time. Subsequent topics, successively added to the area of interest of the foundation, created new divisions of the archive over time. Thus, the set of archive's divisions also represents the development of archive's interest over time. One of these topics was women's military service. Due to the great interest of the foundation in the history of women, emphasizing their role in the past, also in military operations, the archive incorporated a symbol indicating gender of the soldier as an element of the archival identifier of personal dossiers.

The History Tellers from the Lower City in Gdańsk use only one finding aid, which is a basic list of interviews. Their archive is small and there is only one person who takes care of the archive, which is currently stored in his apartment. The archivist knows this collection so well, that he does not need to use any finding aids to find a particular material.

The Civic Archives in Podkowa Leśna uses the methods of arrangement and standards of archival description used by state archives, based on years of Polish scholarship and traditions. However, this is not the result of deliberate actions of members of this archive, or their professional education and knowledge in the field of archiving. This methods of archival practices were forced on the archive by a paid expert employed as part of a grant project aimed at arrangement and description of the collections. As this expert was also an employee of the state archives, they imposed on the Civic Archives methods which were 100% compatible with the practice of state archives subordinate to the Chief Director of State Archives.

Last but not least, it should be stressed that the previously described activity of KARTA related to training of community archivists and providing them with the Open System for Archiving has a twofold impact on research on the archival practice of community archives in Poland. First, as mentioned earlier, due to KARTA's activity the "non-professional", idiosyncratic, and unique methods of archival practice are eroding and being replaced by standardized, "professional" methods. Thus, the original methods should be studied and/or described by archival scholars as soon as

possible, if we intend to preserve them for future reference. Secondly, the impact of KARTA on the professionalization of community archives practices must be treated by archival scholars as an element of the external context of the functioning of all community archives in Poland. This phenomenon should not be ignored, because even in case of archives which, at the time, do not participate in KARTA's network and do not use the Open System for Archiving, it is very probable that their archivists have participated in KARTA's courses, even more probable that they are familiar with KARTA's manuals and materials, and almost certain, that they have heard about KARTA (or initiatives in Gdańsk) and know their practices. This also impacts the potential selection of research cases. Although I planned to study archives completely unaware of the KARTA's movement (in order to research DIY, "home-made", intuitive methods of archival practice), I was not able to find any of those. This does not mean they do not exist, but certainly it means, they are very difficult to locate.

However, it must be noted that this professionalization of community archives is not specifically Polish phenomenon. For example, as Flinn noted in his article published in 2007, "such was the thirst for advice, guidance and support in establishing and running community archive and heritage projects" that the Birmingham Connecting Histories project offered advice to 100 projects, instead of planned five (Flinn, 2007, 170). Most of all, British community archives can use support and resources provided by the Community Archives and Heritage Group, including the Cataloguing Guidelines for Community Archives (CAHG, 2017). In 2004 the National Library of Australia published a manual *Preserving Australia's documentary heritage: a starter kit for community groups* and in 2007 the National Archives of Australia published a booklet entitled *Keep it for the future! How to set up small community archives*, where "basic archival principles and terms are explained in plain English" (sic!) (McAdam, 2007), and in 2012 the Society of American Archivists published a guide *The Lone Arranger: Succeeding in a Small Repository* (Zamon, 2012). Those are only few examples to show that while the Polish case of community archives professionalization is specific, because it was initiated by a community archive (even if the biggest, most influential one, it was still from-below), this phenomenon is not unique and may be observed in various places.

One final notion must be made. A community archive's motivations and values, as it was mentioned before, influence the archive's subject, methods of collecting materials, ways of using them, and, as indicated in this article in particular, the ways of archival arrangement and description. A powerful case was made by Elisabeth Kaplan in her "We are what we collect, we collect what we are" (2000). Describing details of the birth and values negotiated by creators of the American Jewish Historical Society she noticed, that

"archivists are rarely critical and discerning when it comes to documenting identity. Even more curious is the fact that the understanding of and respect for context – and here I mean cultural and historical context – a concept which has always been central to archival work and thinking, is frequently forgotten when it comes to issues of identity. ... [T]he pervading view of archives as sites of historical truth is at best

outdated, and at worst inherently dangerous. The archival record doesn't just happen; it is created by individuals and organizations, and used, in turn, to support their values and missions, all of which comprises a process that is certainly not politically and culturally neutral." (Kaplan, 2000, 147).

Since then, the potential self-celebratory and romantic nature of community archives has already been mentioned in the literature (Vukliš & Gilliland, 2016, 19; Flinn, 2011, 11–12). However, one should not expect that community archives will have a different character. All the more so, a potential user (especially a professional one), applying a scientific critique of the sources, should have access to such general, but key archival information. The context of the archive, including its history, objectives, motivations, and methods used in the archive, in particular archival selection methods, are not always available to the user.

Usually, archivists use the word "context" in relation to archival provenance. This article presented the importance of context in a slightly different way: as a specific, local context of a research study, comprising also the current state of the archival field in Poland, that dictated the research design; as a context of professionalization, crucial to understanding archival arrangement and description in community archives in Poland; as a context of each community archive, its environment, history, motivations, and other features, which directly influence contemporary practices of these archives, and should be recognized not only by archival researchers interested in study on community archives practices, but also these archives' users.

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