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## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION IN MODERN ARCHIVE MANAGEMENT. AN ATTEMPT AT OUTLINING THE ARCHIVE-RESEARCHER-COLLECTIVE DYNAMIC IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INTERDEPENDENCE BETWEEN HISTORY AND MYTH.

### Abstract

*It is self-evident that the management of various types of archives is impacted considerably by social communication. This in turn is no doubt necessitated by the various social changes increasingly prevalent in developing societies. Social communication has also a huge impact on the public perception of the archives and the understanding of their role in society, broadly defined.*

*Therefore, in anticipation of the ongoing social changes, archives should act to influence not only their own maintenance but also their perception within society. Basing the theory of archive management on the idea of social communication can bring numerous benefits to the institution, its employees and resources. In consequence, a twofold interaction takes place: the archive reaches out to meet social needs, while cultural and educational entities have the opportunity to use archival resources in their initiatives addressed to local communities.*

*Today, such cooperation is quite popular, widely undertaken and certainly well known. Many authors have devoted numerous studies to it, however a slightly different aspect of potential communication between archive and community would benefit from more attention. Namely, the role that archives could play in the shaping of social historical consciousness, also regarding the interplay of history and myth. The above-mentioned interaction is often conducted through an intermediary – a researcher, most commonly an historian, but it may be worth exploring the potential of the archives themselves for this kind of interactions.*

**Key words:** social communication, archive management, history, myth.

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## IL RUOLO DELLA COMUNICAZIONE SOCIALE NELLA MODERNA GESTIONE DELL'ARCHIVIO. UN TENTATIVO DI EVIDENZIARE LA DINAMICA ARCHIVIO-RICERCATORE-COLLETTIVITÀ NEL CONTESTO DELL'INTERDIPENDENZA DI STORIA E MITO

### **Sintesi**

*È cosa evidente come la gestione di vari tipi di archivi sia notevolmente influenzata dalla comunicazione sociale. Ciò a sua volta è senza dubbio dato dai vari cambiamenti sociali sempre più diffusi nelle società in via di sviluppo. La comunicazione sociale ha anche un enorme impatto sulla percezione pubblica degli archivi e sulla comprensione del loro ruolo nella società, ampiamente definita. Pertanto, in previsione dei cambiamenti sociali in corso, gli archivi dovrebbero agire per influenzare non solo il proprio mantenimento, ma anche la loro percezione all'interno della società. Basare la teoria della gestione degli archivi sull'idea della comunicazione sociale può portare numerosi benefici all'istituzione, ai suoi dipendenti e alle sue risorse. Di conseguenza, avviene una duplice interazione: l'archivio presta attenzione alle esigenze sociali, mentre gli enti culturali ed educativi hanno l'opportunità di utilizzare le risorse d'archivio nelle loro iniziative rivolte alle comunità locali. Oggi, tale cooperazione è molto popolare, ampiamente intrapresa e certamente ben nota. Molti autori hanno dedicato a questa problematica numerosi studi, tuttavia un aspetto leggermente diverso della potenziale comunicazione tra archivio e comunità trarrebbe beneficio da una maggiore attenzione al ruolo che gli archivi potrebbero svolgere nella formazione della coscienza storica sociale, anche per quanto riguarda l'interazione fra storia e del mito. L'interazione di cui sopra è spesso condotta attraverso un intermediario - un ricercatore, più comunemente uno storico - ma può valere la pena esplorare il potenziale degli archivi stessi per questo tipo di interazioni.*

**Parole chiave:** comunicazione sociale, gestione dell'archivio, storia, mito

## VLOGA DRUŽBENE KOMUNIKACIJE PRI SODODNME ARHIVSKEM MENEDŽMENTU. POSKUS PREDSTAVITVE DINAMIKE ARHIVA - RAZISKOVALCA - KOLEKTIVA V KONTEKSTU SOODVISNOSTI MED ZGODOVINO IN MITOM

### Izvleček

*Jasno je, da na upravljanje različnih vrst arhivov močno vpliva socialna komunikacija. To pa je nedvomno v povezavi z različnimi družbenimi spremembami, ki se vedno bolj pojavljajo v družbah v razvoju. Družbena komunikacija, če na splošno opredelimo, ima tudi velik vpliv na percepcijo arhivov v javnosti in razumevanje njihove vloge v družbi.*

*Zato bi morali arhivi v pričakovanju nenehnih družbenih sprememb delovati tako, da vplivajo ne samo na njihovo vzdrževanje, ampak tudi na njihovo dojetje znotraj družbe. Temelj teorije upravljanja arhivov na ideji družbene komunikacije lahko ustanovi, njenim zaposlenim in gradivu prinese številne koristi. Posledično prihaja do dvojne interakcije: arhiv dosega socialne potrebe, kulturne in izobraževalne osebe pa lahko uporabljajo arhivsko gradivo v svojih pobudah, ki jih naslovljajo na lokalne skupnosti.*

*Danes je takšno sodelovanje precej priljubljeno, široko zastavljeno in zagotovo dobro znano. Številni avtorji so mu posvetili številne študije, vendar bi nekoliko več pozornosti bilo potrebno posvetiti povezavi med arhivom in skupnostjo. Predvsem vlogi, ki bi jo arhivi lahko imeli pri oblikovanju družbene zgodovinske zavesti, tudi glede prepletanja zgodovine in mita. Zgoraj omenjena interakcija pogosto poteka prek posrednika - raziskovalca, najpogosteje zgodovinarja, vendar je morda vredno raziskati potencial samih arhivov za tovrstne interakcije.*

**Ključne besede:** socialna komunikacija, upravljanje arhivov, zgodovina, mit.

Social communication is the process of formulation, modification and transmission of information between individuals, social groups and organisations [Maliszewski, Czerwiński, Paluch, 2012: 88-89]. It can therefore be assumed that such a process, occurring usually within a certain defined community, has as its goal the shaping of knowledge, beliefs and behaviour of the recipient in line with the values or interests of the addresser. Information about the past is conferred upon the recipient through the knowledge of historical sources, professionally decoded. Therefore the addressee is in reception of historical facts that are the subject of active inquiry, parts of reality isolated from the whole for research purposes. They are in a sense transformed and analogous to historical fact, that is fact as it really occurred in the past. It is characteristic of historical inquiry that the perceiving subject is estranged from the perceived object by its different, subsequent temporal context. This may result in the application of one's own, modern conditioning to the approached times, and so evaluating the past with one's own vision, developed to correspond to contemporaneity. The researcher, as part of a certain social group, may also be susceptible to influence by social fact, that is external stimuli and codes of conduct imprinted upon a social group, which, when internalised, shape the person into an element of social life. It can therefore be said that in a sense the problem of historical truth is a problem of the relation between historical narrative and reality outside of the source material.

Within the historical narrative, the facts selected should be reliably backed up by the source material. Here however the problem called the paradox of historical truth manifests itself. The truth or falsity of isolated sentences describing historical facts is separate from the validity or invalidity of the narrative as a whole. This means that it is possible that a factually lacking narrative is recognised as more valid as one in which individual facts are meticulously documented, yet as a whole it implies falsity. (Pomorski, 1991: 19).

Historical myths are convictions consciously held by researchers or manifest in their works that do not submit, or are not submitted, to verification. In historiography they are created in two ways. Either due to negligence in revisiting formulated statements for their verification, which leads to their mythologisation, or due to the modes of thinking about reality and ways of making sense of the world that are established and accepted in the given social group. (Pomorski, 1991: 20).

Myth understood as a more or less warped depiction of reality is in opposition to scientific statements resulting from an application of the scientific method and considered scientifically true. Nonetheless scientific practice is not free from processes of mythologisation that occur within it and are inalienable from it. Historiographical myths are elements of the narrative the verification of which has been abandoned. Their lifespan increases upon becoming attached to ideology, when they enable the permeation and confusion of historical fact with ideas and values. (Solarska, Bugajewski, 2017: 125-127).

Historiographical myth may originate from the psychological aspect of academic endeavour: researchers are reluctant to apply methodological doubt to their own findings or achievements and are reluctant to subject them to criticism. While defending their rationale by all available means, researchers perpetuate the myth. Another source is also ideology – historiography becomes ideologised when made subordinate to an ideologising factor that directs it.

Researchers approach myth variously. Some, taking a position derived from antiscientism, consider myths, though they may have no basis in reliable source material, to be fully justified elements of the historical narrative. Such an approach treats myth much like culture, which cannot be described as true or false. Here we differentiate two perspectives, one optimistic, which identifies myth as a contributor to culture and the other

pessimistic, which considers myth to be an inescapable necessity, resistance to which is futile. Others adopt an approach seeking to uncover and analyse myths, which does not eliminate them from the narrative or the process of its construction, but instead highlights them. Finally, the third approach is the conviction that historical narration is not unlike literature, though it rejects classifying history as literature, broadly understood. While historiography creates myths it simultaneously seeks to challenge them. This is most often the case when attempts are made to modify dated assumptions, not for a long time revisited and present in 'historical awareness'; especially in the wake of new source material surfacing or a method allowing for the verification of previously held knowledge becoming viable. Disproving not previously verified, counterfactual myths by means of criticism of historical sources or polemic with claims considered untrue ought not be and is not the only option. (Topolski, 1984: 234-236).

The practice of historiography requires an awareness of the occurrence of counterfactual and ideologised myths, yet it is even more vital to be aware of the fact that mythological thinking is an aspect of human undertakings that applies also to historical research and narration. Historiographical myth is embedded in the historical narration and is transferred to its audience, constituting a certain narrative-interpretative whole, originating either externally to the narration or within it. The second case is typical of highly mythologised texts, characterised by an overgrowth of rhetoric relative to information and such an interpretation of fact as facilitates the formation and perpetuation of myth and ascribes to it an unjustifiably relevant role.

Myths are created in the process of acquiring knowledge; they result from deliberate action by those who would shape social consciousness a certain way. The processes of mythologisation creates whole narratives regarding the past, containing elements purposefully included or lacking those excluded on purpose. A myth can be created out of an event attested for in the sources, yet one to which distorted historical significance is ascribed. Another source of myth can be the generalisations made by the researcher in face of insufficient source material which then are not verified, mainly due to ideological reasons, although means to do so are subsequently made available. Such practice may be consciously undertaken by the researcher and sometimes even treated as a innovative research method. (Solarska, Bugajewski, 2017: 127-130).

This is not the case with mystification, which is deliberate misinformation and conscious falsification of the past, motivated by a strong, though sometimes nuanced, allegiance to a given ideology or the will to preserve one's interests. Mystification ties directly into manipulation and censorship, including self-censorship when, for example, the author desires to meet the expectations of an authority to which he is in some way subordinate to or dependent upon. Self-censorship becomes a substantial source of myths that are in fact mystifications. The practice of self-censorship can include both depreciation or omission of some facts as well as the exaggeration, distortion or invention of others. (Topolski, 1984: 239-240 ).

Although it is accepted that source material requires both internal and external criticism to evaluate the information it carries so that the truth contained within it can be reached, there is within the research community an understanding of the intrinsic value of historical sources. It can be recognised that the sources, including the less reliable ones, confer certain information and as such remain in a closer relationship with truth, understood according to its classical definition, than the historical narrative, since, as opposed to the narrative, the truth they contain is more primary and therefore more authentic.

Such a distinction between historical narrative and primary sources, construing the latter as repositories of truth, constitutes the myth of historical sources. On it is based the assumption that if two sources considered to be independent of each other both inform of the same historical occurrence then such information is valid. Nevertheless, there can be no guarantee of such information's validity, but only greater likelihood than in the case of relying upon a single source. It is also hard to define the criterium of a source's 'independence'. While sources might have been composed independently, their authors could have, for example, espoused the same worldview or been influenced by the same ideology. (Wrzosek, 2010: 45).

Belief in the myth of historical sources manifests itself in the belief that greater number of sources accessed by the researcher increases the probability that the research will yield the truth about the past, and that it can be a priori assumed that there exists a general gradation of sources, that is that some, (e.g. archival sources) are intrinsically more valuable than others. (Solarska, Bugajewski, 2017: 127-130).

A historical source can be anything that gives us information about the past, allowing us to acquire knowledge of it and depict it. A source is therefore in its essence the information contained within it. From this perspective we can differentiate between potential sources, with which researchers are yet to fruitfully engage and effective ones, those which the historian works with and draws conclusions from. The latter must be evaluated in connection to the research question posed, but also in line with the state of knowledge and methodology. The researcher interprets the source in the context of their learning and system of values, while simultaneously learning from the analysed source and shaping their system of values upon it.

Written sources can be divided into direct and indirect sources. Direct sources manifest the past directly, while indirect sources do so through the mediation of their author. In the latter case, it is important to note whether the source's purpose at creation was to inform someone about something. Sources that were authored already contain an interpretation made by the author. The researcher must therefore reinterpret the source to extract the information sought from it. One cannot be satisfied with an evaluation of the author's reliability as that does not allow full confidence that the information transmitted by them accurately describes the past. The researcher therefore always remains in the sphere of interpretation, although, depending on the source type, of various degrees of robustness.

During the practice of establishing historical fact on the basis of indirect information, interpretation consists in creating a probable narrative relating to the past, yet such that what the researcher established must lie within the area of broadly accepted knowledge and be consistent with it. A narrative can be considered to be in agreement with the actual past when the researcher establishes the facts by the critical interpretation of source-drawn information. The historian's conviction regarding the compatibility of his findings with the past as it occurred is another element of the myth of historical sources.

Direct sources are fragments of the past taken out of context. They only function as sources in conjunction with the consciousness of the researcher and though indispensable for him, they do not form the base of research, but rather a point of departure.

Historical narrative includes also the establishment of facts on the basis of indirect information and the creation of narrative constructions. Increasingly it is held by those dealing with the philosophy of inquiry that truth is not discovered but rather constructed. To reach truth by means of its construction is a social process, but simultaneously a search for the most acceptable position from among many constructed truths which is an element of the method of inquiry. (Topolski, 1996: 78).

The increasingly common belief that in the context of historical narratives a single truth is unreachable has led to the belief that the researcher's relationship to the sources and the description of the past created is subjective. Every narrative is comprised of a theoretical component and ideology, broadly understood, which the researcher cannot evade. (Topolski, 1996: 97-98, 105-106).

The term 'ideology' is sometimes replaced by the term 'political myth'. The concept of ideology is based upon the recognition of units and groups, while such differentiation ought to be viewed in the context of a certain future, that is the reality that one would want to achieve. Such an understanding of political myth is therefore constructed based upon a given, potential future. We detect here an irrational, emotionally loaded element: the aspiration to achieve a new reality encompassing significant areas of life.

Historical sources constitute the link between modern historical narration and the past. A question arises: in light of the above, do the researchers have access to the world of the past, which would imply that their narrative would always be true? They observe the world of the past via the sources and at the same time constructs it within their narrative by interpreting the sources or, in the case of indirect sources, by merging their own interpretation with that of the author of the source. The interpretation of the researcher is today often understood as source information, which is in turn used as a basis for the creation of a historical narrative. Source information is a certain basic information that enables the access to a past reality. It is drawn from a source that has been analysed, and so one that has been accepted as adequately trustworthy. Basic information forms the basis for such studies in which interpretation is present to a very limited extent.

The largest depositories and supervisors of historical sources are various types of archival institutions. Making their collections available is one of the most important functions of the archives, the access policy and the procedures applied to this end constituting significant elements of the management of archival institutions. It follows naturally that in the context of variously defined access to collections, the archive-researcher-community dynamic plays a significant role. The archive as an institution storing sources providing basic information about the past, the researcher as the interpreter of these sources and the community as the recipient of the ordered information.

As was mentioned above, the researcher in the interpretation of historical sources is not free from various forms of conditioning and influence. This in turn may affect the formation of the social consciousness of the collective, which is the ultimate audience of the researcher's work.

The collective memory of a nation's ancient history is retained selectively, while remembrance of newer times, which we remember ourselves or from which we are separated by a few generations at most is much more vivid. Yet contemporary relations between communities or in the wider context between nations are always conditioned by the past, both the ancient, mostly forgotten, and the one remembered not only by historians, but by a large part of society. But it is not only the memory of past interactions, but also convictions about them, myths moulded over generations that influence mutual perception. Sometimes myths well established in the minds of generations have a greater impact on opinion than historical facts.

It is in this context that archives, as important and a much needed contributors, ought to take part in social communication, understood as the process of formulation, modification and transmission of information. Having the unique capability to make accessible the archival resources stored in their collections, they should do so in the broadest possible interpretation of that mission, and so ranging from the traditional form of publishing primary sources to the today perhaps most advisable disseminating scanned copies of archival material via webpages and social media.

Such activity not only popularises the collections of a given archive, but also constitutes the entrance of that institution into an historical discourse taking place among a much wider public. This enables the verification of opinions previously held on a given topic or the independent formulation of new ones. In any case, the possibility of creating one's own judgement on the basis of authentic source material, independently of stereotypes established in a given collective or various views not always constructed with noble goals in mind seems to be of particular value, especially today, when we are often content with quickly accessed and easily acquired and therefore simplified information, on the basis of which we form our opinions about other peoples, societies and nations.

## SUMMARY

Archives, as depositories of knowledge of historical sources have a huge role to play in the broadly understood field of social communication and should be as active as possible in fulfilling this function. They should not limit themselves to the role of transmitters between the researcher and the audience, supplying the sources which then in their edited, interpreted form would be offered to the public. Archives, to fulfil their duties and take advantage of their opportunities in the field of social communication ought to provide 'direct' knowledge, originating from the source material itself. Apart from their scholarly role they can also in this way actively participate in the highly important function of social communication, that is the transmission of information intended for a certain audience, a certain collective. In this way archives can take part in the formation of a social consciousness based not upon stereotype or half-truth but thorough knowledge and in so doing counteract the prejudice and simplification present in collective consciousness, especially in relation to different social groups or minorities.

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