

## Activities of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia with Regard to Developing Symbolic and Identity Ties with the Polish Diaspora

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### Abstract

This article aims to outline the activities of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia (Polish abbrev. MEG) in building relations with the Polish diaspora and maintaining Polish identity among Poles and people with Polish ancestry living abroad. Its main thesis is that the MEG, as a comparatively small institution, has a relatively large potential for shaping symbolic and identity ties with the Polish diaspora and could potentially be an important actor for activities undertaken in this sphere, implemented as part of a broadly defined policy with regard to and for Poles living abroad. The article consists of an introduction, three main sections and a conclusion. In the first section, we briefly define the diasporic policy in its subject and object dimensions, present selected concepts that typify this policy, and point out the role of culture and cultural institutions in building symbolic and identity ties with the diaspora. The second section was devoted to presenting the history, circumstances of the establishment and organizational basis of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia. The museum, although technically a self-government cultural institution, is the first and only museum in the country to show the history of emigration from Poland and Polish lands in a comprehensive way. Section three, on the other hand, focuses on showcasing selected MEG activities in forming symbolic and identity ties with the Polish diaspora.

**Keywords:** diaspora policy, diaspora engagement policy, role of cultural institutions, migration museums, Emigration Museum in Gdynia.

## Introduction

Migrations, in addition to specific historical circumstances and territorial changes as a result of shifting national borders, have contributed enormously to the formation of modern diasporas, whose political, economic and socio-cultural importance has increased significantly in recent years. As a result, many governments have begun to introduce and develop special policies towards the diaspora and to involve migrants and their descendants in the pursuit of national goals and interests. These policies consist of a wide variety of legal, institutional and symbolic actions. Their aim is to link members of the diaspora to their country of origin through relationships and ties that are identity-based, symbolic, legal, institutional, or material in nature. This involves both “building a political community that transcends national borders” (Lesińska 2019: 58) and gaining access to the diaspora’s resources, as well as using its potential to advance national interests. Activities falling under the diaspora policies can be implemented at both the central and local levels.

At the same time, the social importance and significance of migration processes and the resulting immigrant and diasporic communities have been widely reflected in the cultural sphere. This was reflected in the opening of such museums as: the Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York (USA, 1990), the Lower East Side Tenement Museum (USA, 1994), the Immigration Museum in Melbourne (Australia, 1998), the Memorial do Imigrante in São Paulo (Brazil, 1998), the Pier 21 in Halifax (Canada, 1999), Immigration History Museum of Catalonia (Spain, 2004), the German Emigration Center (Germany, 2005), the Paolo Cresci Museum for the History of Italian Emigration (Italy, 2005), the Museo Narrante della Sila (Italy, 2005), the Cité Nationale d’Histoire de l’Immigration (France, 2007), the Emigration Museum BallinStadt Hamburg (Germany, 2007), the Museo Nazionale dell’Emigrazione Italiana (Italy, 2009), The Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp (Belgium, 2013), and the Emigration Museum in Gdynia (Poland, 2015) (Nieroba 2018: 230).

International migrations are, by definition, a cross-border phenomenon, necessarily involving both sending countries (country of origin) and receiving countries (country of settlement). This dual nature of migration processes is reflected in the two dominant profiles of museums addressing migration. Thus, in immigrant countries, whose populations are largely made up of immigrants, immigration museums are particularly popular. Generally, one of the main aims of such museums is to explore the significance of the migration processes and the resulting cultural diversity in host countries (telling the story which has been very often undervalued and under-represented in society and its history). In contrast, there is a tendency in traditionally emigrant countries for central, regional or local governments to launch emigration museums, focusing on the processes of departure from the native country and diaspora. Very often, they are designed to enable a better understanding of the cultural, social and economic significance of emigration in the history of a country, region or

a specific locality. Maria Beatriz Rocha-Trindade and Miguel Monteiro indicate that one of the main reasons “for opening these museums is to enable the descendants of migrants to gain information and personal details about their ancestors, in the form of individual documents, genealogies and data on their countries and cultures of origin” (2007: 147). In addition to this, however, contemporary emigration museums perform a number of other functions and undertake a wide variety of initiatives both for the benefit of the societies in the countries of origin and the diasporas, which will be discussed later in the article.

This article aims to outline the activities of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia (Polish abbrev. MEG) in building relations with the Polish diaspora and maintaining Polish identity among Poles and people with Polish ancestry living abroad. Its main thesis is that the MEG, as a comparatively small institution, has a relatively large potential for shaping symbolic and identity ties with the Polish diaspora and could potentially be an important actor for activities undertaken in this sphere, implemented as part of a broadly defined policy with regard to and for Poles living abroad. This issue is important because in various theoretical concepts of diaspora policy, relatively little space is devoted to cultural institutions. It may be surprising, as these concepts usually emphasize that culture plays a key role in building state policy towards the diaspora. In this context, the Emigration Museum in Gdynia may be seen as a good subject of study, as it is the first and only museum in Poland which has the privilege to tell and explore the complex history of emigration from Polish lands across the centuries. It should be noted that the Emigration Museum in Gdynia has already been the subject of various studies and analyses (Szerle 2014; Raczyński, Jocek 2017; Walaszek 2018; Nowak 2019; Petelska 2019, 2021; Krebs 2021). However, so far, they have not addressed the cultural dimension of diaspora policy.

The article consists of an introduction, three main sections and a conclusion. In the first section, we briefly define the diasporic policy in its subject and object dimensions, present selected concepts that typify this policy, and point out the role of culture and cultural institutions in building symbolic and identity ties with the diaspora. The second section was devoted to presenting the history, circumstances of the establishment and organizational basis of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia. Section three, on the other hand, focuses on showcasing selected MEG activities in forming symbolic and identity ties with the Polish diaspora. It was based on the research approach proposed by Peter Dahlgren and Joke Hermes (2015). The article closes with a conclusion that summarizes the most important findings.

In the literature on the functioning of migrant museums, one can find many texts about how these institutions work with local and immigrant collectives in an effort to build an inclusive community (Whitehead, Eckersley and Mason 2012; Gourievdis 2014; NEMO 2016; Johansson, Bevelander 2017; Baur 2017; Bailey 2018; Labadi 2018). What is lacking in the literature however, are texts that would focus on how emigration museums shape relations and cooperation with diasporic clusters abroad.

Therefore, for the purposes of this text, we have decided to adapt an element of the aforementioned approach proposed by Peter Dahlgren and Joke Hermes, already referred to by Elżbieta Nieroba (2018) in the Polish context, which mainly refers to the role of museums in terms of social inclusion of different social groups.

As part of this approach, Dahlgren and Hermes (2015: 117) “strives to link museums with democratic theory, more specifically with citizenship and its practices”. Their analytical horizon consists of two basic and largely complementary perspectives: civic cultures and cultural citizenship. In terms of civic cultures, the starting point is the question of what cultural factors can facilitate as well as hinder civic participation. Civic cultures can provide citizens with knowledge and experience, social activities and interactions, and opportunities for self-creation and meaning-making, all of which serve to enhance the attributes needed for civic action. The concept of cultural citizenship, on the other hand, seeks to explain how culture offers an opportunity to build and reflect on social cohesion. This aspect analyzes cultural phenomena and looks at how they can serve to strengthen democracy.

While both components of Dahlgren and Hermes’ approach are important, we will focus on civic cultures for the purposes of this article, treating them as elements that largely determine a sense of community and a desire to participate in the life of a given collective (at least to some minimal extent).

According to the aforementioned researchers, civic cultures are modeled as an integrated circuit of six dimensions of mutual reciprocity. The six dimensions are: knowledge, values, trust, spaces, practices, and identities. In our view, activities in these six areas are crucial to the formation of symbolic and identity relations and ties between cultural institutions and diasporic communities.

The source material for the preparation of the second and third sections of the article was obtained primarily through the use of two research methods: participant observation and institutional analysis. The use of the first method was a natural consequence of the fact that the authors of this article have been cooperating with the Emigration Museum in Gdynia for a long time and have been involved in a number of activities carried out by this institution. Thanks to this, we had an insight into the process of the functioning of this museum, formulating its substantive program, developing a mission and vision, or shaping the approach to various groups of audiences (including the Polish diaspora). This gave a unique opportunity to get to know the museum “from the inside”.

Participant observation was realized within another research project concerning the Emigration Museum in Gdynia. It has been conducted from 2019 to 2022, and its basic goal was an analysis of the ongoing process of changing the museum’s vision and mission, resulting in the transformation of the institution’s profile (from emigration to emigration-immigration). Observations were registered by systematically made notes, which particularly covered museum weekly briefings and program management meetings (concerning management and heads of individual departments).

Although the material was collected under another project, some of it proved to be useful during the development of this hereby article.

We are aware of our presence in double roles (of researchers and museum collaborators) therefore we made every effort to meet the difficult methodological and ethical requirements resulting from the research method used and the existing situation. In this context it must be noted that participant observation may generally cause scientists many problems and dilemmas (Chomczyński 2006; Męcfal 2012; Nieporowski 2015; Szuchalska 2020). By choosing this method we, aware of its strengths and weaknesses, followed the words of one of the pioneers of everyday sociology – Jack Douglas (1976: 112): “when one’s concern is the experience of people, the way that they think, feel and act, the most truthful, reliable, complete and simple way of getting that information is to share their experience”.

The Emigration Museum in Gdynia and its functioning have long been the subject of various studies by the authors of this article, as reflected in publications, conference speeches and popular science. In this regard, we pay great attention to the separation of the museum as a “subject of cooperation” and the museum as an “object of research”. In doing so, the museum is one of many entities with which we collaborate, which gives us a broader research perspective. We recognize the weaknesses of the institution in many areas of operation, but there are relatively few in terms of building relationships with the Polish diaspora – the most important limitations are due to budgetary issues and the need to be community-oriented, since the Emigration Museum in Gdynia is an institution of local government, visitors from Poland and, more recently, immigrants. The museum is not a solely diaspora-oriented institution, it must divide its “attention” among different categories of stakeholders.

In addition, written sources on the Emigration Museum in Gdynia were mainly documentation collected by this museum in the form of annual reports, project documentation, scientific publications issued by the museum, pamphlet prints, press notes etc.

Information obtained through participant observation was completed with materials obtained through institutional analysis. In general, this method analyses how institutions behave and function. According to Avner Greif and Christopher Kingston (2011: 15) „institutions include both formal rules, which are explicit, written rules such as laws and constitutions, and informal constraints such as conventions and norms”. Therefore, the analysis was carried out in relation to both empirical rules (informal rules-in-use and norms) and also theoretical rules (formal rules and law). Analysis of printed and electronic materials produced by or pertaining to this institution (including statute of the institution, resolutions of the City Council of Gdynia, reports on substantive activities of the museum) was especially useful in this context.

## Dimensions of diaspora policies

Diaspora policies are most often defined through the prism of state institutions and actions taken towards citizens, or members of the national community (in the case of states that did not exist during the period of formation of diasporic clusters), and their descendants who live outside the territory of that state. An example of such an approach can be found in the definition proposed by Alan Gamlen (2008: 3), who defines diaspora policies as “state institutions and practices that apply to members of that state’s society who reside outside its borders”. At the same time, Marion Noack and Valerie Wolff (2013: 6) add that, unlike programs or projects, diaspora policies constitute a coherent set of decisions with a common long-term goal of influencing diaspora engagement. In the Polish literature, a similar position is represented by Magdalena Lesińska (2018: 313), who describes diaspora policy as “a set of activities of the state and the institutions responsible for them, whose direct or indirect target audience are members of the diaspora”.

Among the basic features that characterize diaspora policies are, as a rule, the multiplicity of actors involved in their implementation and execution (in the subject or agent dimension) and their variability and complexity (in the object dimension).

The institutional system responsible for making diaspora policies a reality can include a number of diverse actors, both state and quasi- or non-state. It can be based on the existence of: special, separate ministries dedicated to the diaspora; institutions operating within ministries; inter-ministerial working groups; diaspora liaison bodies established under the heads of state or government; special parliamentary commissions; councils or committees with advisory functions on diaspora issues; economic agencies, as well as networks of diplomatic and consular posts. In addition to the central level, it is also not uncommon for various types of institutions dedicated to diasporas to be established at the regional and local levels (e.g., cities). Political parties, associations and foundations, as well as churches are also involved within the sphere of diaspora policies (Gamlen 2014: 182; Lesińska 2019: 61; Boyle, Kitchin 2013: 322).

The material scope of diaspora policies, on the other hand, includes the narrative-symbolic dimension, which includes symbolic activities (such as establishing a diaspora day; organizing meetings, congresses and conferences dedicated to the diaspora or holding events involving members of the diaspora in their countries of residence); the legal-institutional dimension (which includes such activities as: establishing and supporting organizations representing the diaspora; protecting the rights of members of the diaspora in countries of settlement; facilitating returns and repatriation; confirming legal status and facilitating the acquisition of citizenship); the social dimension related primarily to the sphere of culture (establishing mass media dedicated to the diaspora, or supporting cultural institutions operating abroad) or education (organizing, maintaining or supporting a network of schools with an appropriate national curriculum, or organizing courses in the language of the country of origin); the economic dimension

relating to economic affairs (facilitating financial transfers, facilitating foreign direct investment, or working for the transfer of knowledge, technology and human capital), and the political dimension (in the form of creating solutions for the political representation of the diaspora or granting political and electoral rights) (Lesińska 2019: 65–66).

As noted by Michał Nowosielski and Witold Nowak, countries differ in the approaches they take towards diaspora policies. This differentiation is largely dictated by the objectives to be pursued by these policies, which can be economic, cultural, social or political (Nowosielski, Nowak 2017: 75). In this regard, there are several interesting typologies of diaspora policies in the existing literature on the subject.

It is worth recalling at this point one of the first attempts to typify these policies, developed by Grzegorz Babiński back in the early 1990's. This author distinguished four general policy models that a state can apply towards its own diasporic community. He distinguished between: 1) *A policy of absorption*, which sees members of the diaspora as part of the national community by their country of origin. 2) *A policy of rejection*, in which the state not only rejects the possibility of recognizing the diaspora as part of the national community, but even adopts a hostile attitude towards it. 3) *A policy of selectivity*, in which the state focuses only on, and targets selected diasporic communities, leaving out other clusters of fellow citizens and their descendants living abroad. 4) *Daltonist policy*, under which the state officially addresses no actions toward its diaspora) (Babiński 1992).

A somewhat similar classification is proposed by Francesco Ragazzi (2014). Based on a comparative analysis of thirty-five countries, this researcher identified five ideal types that define the general attitude of countries toward their diasporas:

- 1) *The expatriate state*, which, in developing its policy toward the diaspora, focuses on its educational and cultural dimensions. In this case, the target audience of the initiatives are primarily the high-income members of the diaspora. Ragazzi cites countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain and Italy as examples of states applying this model.
- 2) *The closed state* which seeks to strongly regulate or restrict the mobility of its citizens, as well as to control diasporic communities. As a rule, countries implementing this model do not grant privileges to members of the diaspora, nor do they include them in their support system – for example, they do not grant voting rights to fellow citizens living abroad, or develop their own education system abroad. Examples include countries such as Cuba, North Korea, Iran and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- 3) *The global-nation state*. This category, in turn, includes countries that have comprehensive policies for engaging the diaspora and confer broad packages of rights and privileges on their compatriots living abroad. Countries employing these strategies, for example, offer diaspora members new forms of para-citizenship (through the introduction of proof of descent documents), provide

support to people returning home, organize conferences and congresses with the participation of diaspora representatives, develop language and cultural education programs for diaspora members, etc. In return however, they seek to access the economic, political and socio-cultural resources held by diaspora communities. These types of policies are implemented by countries such as Mexico, Ireland, Greece, Russia, India, Morocco and Ethiopia.

- 4) *The managed labor state*. Under this model, states in their policies toward the diaspora focus on extending support to both the returnees and those who remain abroad. However, they focus their activities primarily on social issues and those related to welfare. This group includes countries that, although they have large emigrant populations abroad, have not yet developed comprehensive policies toward the diaspora (Colombia, Jordan, Bangladesh), as well as those that experience primarily labor and circular migration (Philippines, Brazil) and focus their efforts on them.
- 5) *The indifferent state*. Countries that show no interest in their diasporas, in the sense that they do not take any special measures with regard to them to induce members of diasporic communities to engage with their country of origin. Ragazzi cites Belgium, Lebanon or Nigeria as examples.

In contrast, a slightly different perspective was adopted by Peggy Levitt and Rafael de la Dehesa (2003). These authors did not attempt to capture the general attitude of states toward their diasporas, but based their typology on an analysis of the scopes of the policies in question that were implemented with respect to diasporic communities (mainly in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Haiti and the Dominican Republic). Following from that, Levitt and Dehesa point to the existence of five main types of policies, examined through the perspective of areas of critical importance to countries of origin. These are: 1) *Bureaucratic reforms* (ministerial or consular) aimed at creating an institutional system responsible for contacts with the diaspora. 2) *Investment policies*, which are primarily designed to induce members of the diasporas to invest funds in their countries of origin and to introduce measures to facilitate this. 3) *Political rights: dual citizenship and the vote abroad*, involving the expansion of political rights enjoyed by diaspora members (acceptance of dual citizenship, voting rights, ability to run for public office). 4) *State services abroad*, that is, extending protection and providing access to state services, which go beyond traditional consular services. 5) *Symbolic politics*, aimed at strengthening the sense of identity of diaspora members and their ties to their country of origin.

In recent years, the theoretical concept of diaspora policies developed by Alan Gamlen (2006) has attracted considerable publicity. This researcher, referring to the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault, and analyzing the solutions for contact and cooperation with diasporas operating in some seventy countries, distinguished three basic types of strategies for political action directed at diasporas, viz:



- capacity building policies, aimed at discursively producing a state-centric ‘trans-national national society’, and developing a set of corresponding state institutions;
- extending rights to the diaspora, thus playing a role that befits a legitimate sovereign, and
- extracting obligations from the diaspora, based on the premise that emigrants owe loyalty to this legitimate sovereign (Gamlen 2006: 5–6).

Capacity-building policy is implemented through reference to national symbolism (*symbolic nation-building*) and the creation of appropriate institutional solutions (*institution-building*). In the former case, states, through rhetorical and symbolic gestures and actions, seek to bring emigrants back into the fold of the “national” community they once left. This can be done through, among other things: appeals and declarations made by leading politicians, organizing and celebrating holidays dedicated to diasporas, introducing programs for learning the language and history of the country of origin, etc. Institutionally, relations with the emigrant communities were originally maintained through diplomatic and consular services. Today however, states are increasingly creating specialized entities to “manage” diasporas, which, as mentioned earlier, can take a variety of different forms.

The second type of diaspora engagement strategy is an effort by the states to expand the rights of the diaspora and even to grant its members certain privileges. These include both socio-economic and political rights (access to the social security system, the health care system or education; protection for workers employed abroad; or the granting of voting rights).

In addition to building a symbolic and institutional capacity and extending their rights to members of the diasporas, the countries of origin – as if in return – also attempt to extract presumptive obligations from the diaspora members. The state bodies are concerned here, first and foremost, with obtaining tangible benefits in both economic and political terms. In the economic sphere, state activity may focus especially on such measures as increasing incoming financial transfers to the country, raising the level of investment, or the transfer of knowledge and technology. In the political sphere, on the other hand, it is mainly a matter of lobbying or public diplomacy activities (Raczyński 2021).

In practice, these strategies – or at least some of their elements – generally occur together as part of a system of comprehensive solutions dedicated to the diaspora.

Within the framework of the theoretical approaches outlined above, it has been pointed out that an important element of diaspora engagement policy is building symbolic and identity ties between the country of origin and the emigrants and their descendants. These activities are, as it were, the starting point for developing legal, economic or political relations and implementing appropriate solutions in these areas.

It should be noted that an important role in terms of building symbolic and identity ties is assigned to culture and cultural institutions. Kingsley Aikins and Nicola White (2011: 22, 63) comment in this context that culture is not only “the bridge between the homeland and diaspora”, but also “is the underlying glue that can bridge diaspora strategies”. These authors stress that culture is “one of the main catalysts in attracting members into the diaspora and is the fundamental premise upon which every dimension of diaspora engagement develops” (2011: 63). Also in the Polish subject related literature, it is emphasized that building a national society in a transnational space, involves “developing a cultural code through which it becomes possible to conduct diaspora policies”, and one of the key tasks in this regard is funding research on emigration and establishing institutions aimed at commemorating emigration (Fiń et al. 2013: 29–30).

## **Emigration Museum in Gdynia – history and operations**

The idea of establishing a cultural institution dedicated to depicting the theme of emigration from the Polish territories in a comprehensive manner, emerged at the level of Gdynia’s self-government as early as 2007 (Szerle 2014: 395). This was inspired by the historic building of the Marine Station, a key element of the emigration infrastructure created in Gdynia during the interwar period. Thus, the self-government authorities, as had previously been the case in cities such as Antwerp (Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp) and New York (Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration), decided to use the building that formerly served, among others to service the emigration traffic, for exhibition purposes, commemorating the phenomenon of emigration.

The Marine Station was officially inaugurated on December 8, 1933. In servicing passenger and emigrant traffic, it replaced the first permanent port warehouse, the so-called “tin warehouse”, located just behind the Port Captain’s Office, which, in all likelihood, from the turn of 1927/28 was a place for the ticket, passport and customs clearance for passengers leaving the country. The new building, which was designed to provide comfortable conditions for travelers, was located in a prime location (adjacent to the port entrance and the Port Captain’s Office). The building housed the offices of the Gdynia-America Line, customs and port services offices, a post office, an exchange bureau, and a waiting room with 1st, 2nd and 3rd class restaurant facilities. In addition to its functional features, in the 1930s, the building, as one of the most stately and presentable in the city, also served important social functions. It was the venue for New Year’s Eve and charity balls, meetings and reunions, boxing matches, masses, etc. As already mentioned, the Marine Station was part of a larger system of emigration infrastructure, which also included the Gdynia railway station, the Emigration Stage (camp) in Grabówek (linked to the Marine Station via rail connections) and the Quarantine Facility in Babi Dół (linked by water).

During World War II, the Marine Station building was taken over by the German Navy and served as the headquarters of the Kriegsmarinearsenal. It presumably returned to its original functions only in April 1947, with the return to service of the vessel m/s Batory. Since then, until March 1988, namely the decommissioning of the last Polish transatlantic ts/s Stefan Batory, the building was utilized to service passenger traffic. Subsequently, the premises of the building were used for administrative and commercial purposes (it housed the Security Access Control (Port Pass) Office, the Shipping Services Department, a health and safety instruction room, and some of the space was rented to private entities – it housed, among others, a furniture showroom). Eventually, in May 2013, the building was leased from the Port of Gdynia Authority and construction and reconstruction work commenced, in order to adapt it to house the Emigration Museum.

The idea of establishing an institution in Gdynia that would commemorate emigration from the Polish territories began to take real shape relatively quickly. A preliminary step towards this was the signing of a “Letter of Intent on expressing willingness for collaborative efforts aimed at the establishment of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia, 1 Polska St.” on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2010 by the President of the City of Gdynia Wojciech Szczurek and the President of the Port of Gdynia Authority SA Janusz Jarosiński. In the document, the parties recognized that the undertaking was of a national character and declared their willingness to collaborate in establishing in Gdynia “the Emigration Museum – a scientific and educational institution dealing with the historical processes of Polish emigration” (List intencyjny w sprawie wyrażenia woli wspólnych działań na rzecz powstania Muzeum Emigracji w Gdyni). The very next month, a competition was launched to develop a preliminary program for the museum, and in October, the official presentation of the Emigration Museum design took place in the Great Hall of the Royal Castle in Warsaw.

The other milestones on the road to implementing the idea of a museum dedicated to the history of Polish emigration took place at the beginning of 2012. First, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February, in consultation with the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, the statute of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia (in organization) was agreed upon, and then, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, the Gdynia City Council adopted Resolution No. XVII/332/12 on establishing and granting statute to the cultural institution called “Emigration Museum in Gdynia”, which, until the opening of the permanent exhibition, remained in organization (Szerle 2014: 397). The statute specifies that “the object of the Museum’s activities is to disseminate knowledge about emigration from Polish territories and the migration of people over the centuries, as well as to collect and make available collections on the history of emigration” (Uchwała nr XVII/332/12 Rady Miasta Gdyni z 22.02.2012 r. w sprawie utworzenia i nadania statutu instytucji kultury pod nazwą Muzeum Emigracji w Gdyni).

The investor of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia was the City of Gdynia. The total cost of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia project was PLN 49.3 million, of

which PLN 23.8 million was financed by the EU JESSICA initiative, while the rest was PLN 25.5 million from city funds. Renovation and adaptation work at the Marine Station and the adjacent Transit Warehouse were underway since May 2013. They were carried out according to a design by Ae fusion Studio from Krakow, and were designed by Alicja Kiszczuk, Dirk Pfeifer, Andrzej Lubicz-Lisowski and Andrzej Bomerski.

The stage of establishing and organizing the museum was finally completed on May the 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015, when the ribbon-cutting ceremony and the opening of the doors of the historic Marine Station, the final headquarters of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia, where the permanent exhibition is located, took place.

Originally – according to the “Functional and program premises of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia”, which was developed for the competition for the visual and spatial concept of the permanent exhibition – the institution from the beginning of its existence was to pursue four basic objectives:

- 1) educational and popularizing;
- 2) fulfilling exhibition and museum roles;
- 3) social and integrative;
- 4) research objective.

School-age children and teenagers, residents of Gdynia, tourists from Poland and abroad and from the Polish diaspora were identified as the museum’s main audiences (Założenia funkcjonalno-programowe Muzeum Emigracji w Gdyni).

The museum’s permanent exhibition is of fundamental importance for the achievement of educational and publicity goals, as well as for exhibition and museum purposes, located in an area of about 1,500 square meters. Conceptual work on its development was initiated as early as 2011. A year later, the scenario for the permanent exhibition was created, and from 2013 until the day of the exhibition opening in May 2015, intensive work on its preparation continued (Fiałkowska 2015: 5). According to the concept, the exhibition was to deal mainly with “emigration in the sense of out-migration for settlement and labor migration, in the period when they assumed mass scale” (that is, from the second half of the 19th century). Earlier out-migration and other types of population movements were to be developed only in a synthetic way, while the issues of political and forced migration were to be dealt with separately (Założenia funkcjonalno-programowe Muzeum Emigracji w Gdyni). In view of this, the permanent exhibition places particular emphasis on presenting migration as a social phenomenon, which consists of the destinies and experiences of individuals caught up in migratory flows. As far as the chronological approach is concerned, the narrative of the permanent exhibition covers the history of emigration from the Polish territories – starting with the Great Emigration, through the emigration at the time of the Industrial Revolution and the 20-year Interwar Period, the period of turmoil associated with World War II and its aftermath, the era of the Polish People’s Republic, and ending with the latest installment of

emigration from Poland, including that initiated by our country's accession to the European Union.

The opening of a permanent exhibition at the museum's final location necessitated the adoption of a new statute for the institution. Its enactment was carried out through the adoption of Resolution No. XXII/533/16 of the Gdynia City Council on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2016. The statute stipulated that the museum is a cultural institution falling under self-government. Its organizer is the City of Gdynia Municipality, while the area of operation is the area of the Republic of Poland and abroad. The new statute identified two basic scopes of the institution's activities, i.e., presenting the history of emigration from Polish territories and disseminating knowledge about the phenomenon of migration in the world. These tasks are to be carried out through:

- 1) conducting cultural, dissemination, educational, research and publishing activities;
- 2) organizing permanent exhibitions, temporary exhibitions at the headquarters and outside, in Poland and abroad, as well as other forms of cultural and educational activities;
- 3) collecting, inventorying, cataloguing and scientific processing of monuments and collections as well as documentation materials, also in digital form;
- 4) making the accumulated collections available for scientific, educational and exhibition purposes;
- 5) storing the collected artefacts and preserving them in a way that is accessible for scientific research;
- 6) processing of copies, replicas and multimedia images of objects with historical and artistic value;
- 7) lending and accepting on the deposit of historical artifacts and collections;
- 8) development, publication and dissemination of printed and multimedia publications, films and computer programs belonging in the sphere of its activities and thematically related activities;
- 9) running a professional library and a reading room;
- 10) conducting training and internships in the field of museology;
- 11) collaboration with the self-government and government administration bodies, as well as museums, institutions and non-governmental organizations of a similar nature at home and abroad (Statut Muzeum Emigracji w Gdyni).

Even a cursory analysis of documents related to the establishment and operation of the MEG shows that from the very beginning it was assumed and planned that the activities of this institution would go beyond the territory of Poland and would be oriented towards the collaboration and engagement with the Polish diaspora.

The Emigration Museum in Gdynia, as a municipal institution, like all cultural institutions in Gdynia, is under the authority of the Department of Culture of the City of Gdynia, which supervises its activities. Therefore, the activities of the Emigration

Museum in Gdynia are based mainly on a subjective subsidy from the museum's organizer, the Municipality of Gdynia. The percentage share of funds from the city was in the range of 87%–95% in 2016–2022. Additional sources of funding were: targeted grants – investment grants from the organizer, grants and donations – from external entities and institutions, and own revenues – from the Emigration Museum in Gdynia's business activities, including: ticket sales for the permanent exhibition, events, concerts and other cultural events, sales of books, magazines and souvenirs in the Museum's store, as well as revenues from leasing space.

## **Activities of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia with regard to developing symbolic and identity ties with the Polish diaspora**

As we have mentioned earlier, there are six areas that are crucial to the formation of symbolic and identity relations and ties between cultural institutions and diasporic communities. These include: values, knowledge, trust, space, practice and identity. The activities of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia fall into all six of these categories, making the institution an example of an institution that supports the building of bridges between Polish society and communities of people of Polish descent living abroad.

### **Values**

Inclusive and democratic communities cannot function well without recourse to values such as equality, reciprocity and tolerance, among others. Dahlgren and Hermes (2015: 127) point out in this context that "values reflect sensitivity" – they determine how people live together and treat each other. In this area, museums have much to offer. The values that characterize democratic communities often manifest themselves in civility, respect for opposing opinions, openness, accountability, etc.

In the area of values, the activities and functioning of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia are fundamentally determined by the existing mission and vision statement of the museum, which was developed in 2021 with the participation of the museum's staff and management. It is contained in the following sentences:

*The Emigration Museum in Gdynia is a place that is open onto the world. This is where the stories of emigrants and immigrants, human experiences, their hopes and fears meet. To understand who we are today and who we can become tomorrow. Our shared home – 1 Polska. We are all migrants here.*

*We want to build a reality that welcomes everyone. Regardless of who they are, where they come from and where they live (Muzeum Emigracji w Gdyni).*

In stating its vision and its mission the team of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia wanted to express its openness to all kinds of challenges presented by the modern world, both those arising from the meanders of history as well as those caused by today's socio-political transformations. The Museum would like to contribute to a better understanding among successive generations of Polish migrants and build ties between them, which in the future may result in a fruitful collaboration between members of the Polish diaspora and the Polish residents. In this context, the former Marine Station, which in the past was a place of farewells, can now be looked upon as a "shared home", a meeting place and a safe haven free from misunderstanding.

The Museum's mission statement echoes the values of openness, hospitality, tolerance and respect, which are reflected in all of its activities, including cultural, educational and scientific pursuits.

## Knowledge

Modern museums must be a source of reliable knowledge, available both by means of publications (books, reports, analyses, etc.) as well as through debates and discussions. The knowledge provided by cultural institutions however, must not refer only to current affairs or political issues. Dahlgren and Hermes (2015: 126–127) emphasize that museums today should also address themes focused on the past, on other peoples and cultures, on art and religion, all of which are extremely important for understanding the contemporary globalized world. Particularly relevant to the aspect of knowledge are the various forms in which it can be transmitted: from traditional texts to today's most advanced interactive, multimedia and virtual experiences.

The Emigration Museum in Gdynia both disseminates knowledge about the Polish diaspora scattered around the world and conducts its own independent research in this area. An example of the former activity is not only the permanent exhibition that presents the history of emigration from Poland and Polish territories in a multi-thread and multi-sensory manner, as well as showcasing the most important Polish diaspora communities, but also the considerable number of various meetings, discussions, debates, lectures, etc., organized at the museum, often with the participation of representatives of the diaspora. The second activity (research) is carried out primarily through in-house research projects focusing on the diaspora.

In recent years, the museum's research activities have focused in particular on highly skilled Polish emigrants and members of the Polish diaspora. Examples include such projects as: the two editions of the project "E-migration. Polish technological diaspora", which aimed to obtain information about Poles and people of Polish heritage employed abroad in the widely understood modern sectors of the economy; "III Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Marynarki Wojennej in Gdynia – Where Do We Go From Here? Emigrational and Educational Plans of The Graduates", a project focusing on learning about the educational plans of high school graduates from the Polish Naval High

School No. 3 in Gdynia, who intended to study abroad, or the project “Femigration. Highly qualified Polish women abroad”, focusing on Polish women who have emigrated and who are pursuing their life and career goals abroad. Reports summarizing these projects have been published in open access mode on the museum’s website.

## Trust

Trust is an essential element of community. According to Dahlgren and Hermes (2015: 128), museums tend to promote citizen trust through the overall atmosphere they create for their visitors, by providing a place where they can socialize with others.

The Emigration Museum in Gdynia has been consistently building the brand of an institution that is both trustworthy (both with respect to institutions and individuals), as well as being a visitor-friendly venue (this is reflected in the museum’s mission and vision cited above). This is based upon creating an image and reputation for the museum as a credible and responsible institution. To a large extent, this is achieved through the implementation of substantive activities (including research) and taking part in public debates on significant migration-related matters (which are not infrequently controversial in nature). An example of the latter activity is, for example, a series of virtual meetings entitled “Man on the Border. You ask, we provide the answers”, organized in the last quarter of 2021 and offering audiences the opportunity to acquire reliable knowledge of the then unfolding migrant crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border.

An important part of building trust between the museum and the diaspora is to invite its members to collaborate and to encourage them to express their opinions. A good example of this is the project titled “Emigrant Archive”, implemented in the format of an oral history archive. Within the framework of this project, the Gdynia-based institution collects and exhibits emigration stories of Polish people. Emigration narratives are systematically archived in the form of written accounts as well as audio and video recordings. Over the years, they will form a multidimensional picture of former and contemporary emigration. The following are quotes from the project’s internet pages:

*At the Emigration Museum, the history of Poland is construed as the history of all Poles – both those living in the country and abroad. We wish this polyphony of emigrant, re-emigrant and immigrant voices to inspire discussion and the social debate on former and contemporary emigration (Archiwum Emigranta).*

As of September 2022, the “Emigrant Archive” has collected nearly 280 accounts, including nearly 240 audio and/or video recordings. You can find them on the website: <https://archiwumemigranta.pl/pl/>

Another example of close collaboration with diaspora representatives, which requires mutual trust, but which also fosters this trust, is the museum’s statutory activity of collecting and presenting memorabilia left behind by Polish emigrants, carried out by the Collections Section. Since its inception, one of the museum’s main



tasks has been to collect and preserve artefacts related to the history of emigration. In just a few years (since 2015), a museum collection of several thousand artefacts has been created, with more being added every day.

The Emigration Museum focuses on the stories of individuals. The same is true of the collection which is created primarily through the donations of emigrants and their descendants. Thus, the vast majority of the museum's collection are personal items. They consist of letters, diaries, photographs, documents, trunks and suitcases, household items of everyday use, etc.

A particular manifestation of confidence on the part of state institutions, affecting the way the museum is perceived as a trustworthy institution, was the inclusion of the museum's scientific and research contributions to the study of the Polish diaspora in the work of the Polish Senate Commission on Emigration Affairs and Liaison with Poles Abroad, concerning the development of a new framework for Polish diaspora policies, followed by the decision to hold an off-site meeting of the aforementioned commission at the headquarters of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia, which took place on 30.05.2022. As Kazimierz Michał Ujazdowski, chairman of the Commission, noted in his statement:

*...The Senate celebrates the 100th anniversary of its first session, but we strive to ensure that the work we do is focused on the future. And this is why we are meeting in a place that is uniquely associated with the issues of emigration – the Emigration Museum in Gdynia. We wish to hold a debate in the circle of experts and, above all, the representatives of the Polish Diaspora, and talk about the views of the Polish Diaspora on Polish politics (Senacka komisja obradowała w Muzeum Emigracji).*

The meeting of the Senate commission was accompanied by a debate titled "Directions for Polish diaspora policies in the assessment of the Polish Diaspora and expert circles – experiences and recommendations".

Proof of the local government's confidence in the Emigration Museum in Gdynia was the request by the Mayor of the City of Gdynia to the Emigration Museum in Gdynia for assistance in the situation of the migration crisis related to the launch of a full-scale invasion of the Ukrainian state by the Russian Federation on February the 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The Emigration Museum in Gdynia has been involved in several initiatives related to helping war refugees, along with museum employees becoming coordinators of refugee centers established in Gdynia. Meanwhile, proof of the good opinion of the Polish community about the Emigration Museum in Gdynia is a number of joint initiatives. Since its inception, the Emigration Museum in Gdynia has organized a significant number of temporary exhibitions, scientific conferences and various events together with various organizations that bring together members of the Polish diaspora from around the world. Examples of such cooperation include scientific conferences organized together with the Kosciuszko Foundation, the Polish American Historical Association, and the Polish Institute of Art and Science in the United States.

## Space

Participation in the community requires communication spaces, to enable gathering. Dahlgren and Hermes (2015: 128) point out that the spaces offered by museums can play a significant role in this context, whereby it is not only physical spaces that are referred to here, but also virtual ones. This happens because “the Internet and its ancillary technologies are becoming the premier spaces” for many people. And that is why “a presence in the digital cultural public sphere is an immense asset”.

The museum is very eager on bringing together in its spaces, both the Polish residents as well as members of the Polish diaspora, this remark referring to both physical and virtual spaces.

In this first aspect, the museum seeks to participate in the Polish diaspora events organized in Poland. For example, in 2019 the Gdynia institution was a partner of the Seventh World Congress of Polish Studies held in Gdańsk and Gdynia. The main theme of the event were the anniversaries celebrated in 2019 including, among others, the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, the 30th anniversary of the initiation of Poland’s political transformation, the 20th anniversary of our country’s membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the 15th anniversary of our accession to the European Union. The Congress featured more than 270 speakers and over 100 participants representing academic research centers from around the world. The program for the event included a welcome meeting for participants at the Museum, combined with a guided tour of the permanent exhibition. An example of a similar activity was the museum’s participation (as a partner) in the 60 million Congress in Gdańsk in August 2022, one of a series of international events bringing together key business and political leaders, as well as cultural and social activists connected with the European Union, Poland and the Polish Diaspora. As part of the event, its participants were given an opportunity to attend a tour of the permanent exhibition and the Emigration Museum building.

The presence of the Emigration Museum in the virtual space is not limited to the website, the channels on platforms such as YouTube and Spotify or the social media profiles (Facebook or Instagram).

An important tool for the presence of the Gdynia institution in the virtual space, as well as a channel of communication with the diaspora, is the journal published by the museum, titled “The Polish Migration Review/Polski Przegląd Migracyjny”. It is an interdisciplinary yearbook with a popular science focus. The periodical is devoted to migration issues, considered both from the historical and contemporary perspective. The journal is available in both the printed format and digital download for e-books.

Each of the individual issues of the journal deals with a different research issue related to migration (the 2019 issue was devoted to the migration of highly skilled people, the 2020 issue to climate migration, the 2021 issue to migration stereotypes, and the 2022 issue to the migrant’s everyday life). We invite outstanding specialists

in many fields, both domestic and foreign (including those from the Diaspora) to work with us on each new issue of the journal, which makes it possible to look at many areas from a wider perspective. The journal is bilingual – each text is published in both Polish and English.

It is worth noting at the same time that the Covid 19 coronavirus pandemic resulted in a significant part of the museum's program activities being moved to virtual space, thus making it more accessible to Poles and people with Polish roots residing abroad.

## Practice

Dahlgren and Hermes (2015: 129) emphasize in their text that community (civic) practices can be, and often are, learned; however, they require certain (communication) skills and competencies. In this aspect, museums can serve as venues – in the physical and virtual sense – for acquiring these skills through practical exercises. They can offer knowledge and tools that not only enhance the experience while visiting the museum, but also (and perhaps most importantly) can be applied outside the museum.

Building ties between the people of the native country and the diaspora requires a mutual understanding of the different historical circumstances and cultural conditions. These aspects constitute an important part of the activities of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia. The Education Department within this institution conducts publicity and promotional activities in many forms, including: educational programs for schools and pre-schools, classes for children and families, programs for youth and adults, and one-off educational events related to other museum activities. All our museum activities are consistent with the core curriculum of pre-school education and general education in all the individual types of schools. They implement and extend the content of the core curriculum. As far as the priorities of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia are concerned, of equal importance as providing the knowledge, is the shaping of social, cultural, digital or civic competencies in children and youth who visit the museum.

An important educational “tool” in most of the classes designed for pre-schools and schools are the individual rooms of the permanent exhibition, which tell the story of emigration from the Polish territories from the 19th century to the present day. Students have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the exhibition during an active tour with an educator or a tour with a worksheet under the supervision of a teacher.

In addition to the workshops, the museum also offers meetings with witnesses to history, residing in the Tri-City, titled “Personal chronicle. First-hand migration stories”. As part of the sessions, it is possible to arrange a meeting with immigrants and re-emigrants living in Poland and talk to them, among other things, about migration experiences or life in a multicultural environment. The meetings are also possible in an online version.

Although the museum's educational activities are aimed primarily at the Polish public, they extend beyond our country's borders. An example is the collaboration established between the museum's Education Department and the Polish Diaspora Education Foundation, under which the Gdynia institution took part in the "Virtual Autumn at the Museum" project (the aim was to broaden the knowledge of Polish culture and history) (2021) and conducted a webinar and quiz on Polish emigrants (2022).

## Identity

Dahlgren and Hermes (2015: 129–130) argue that appropriate knowledge, practices, values and trust contribute to build and strengthen identity, both individual and collective. In this context, the identity dimension is somewhat derivative of the other four areas.

Attention to the cultivation of the Polish dimension of the Diaspora members identity is evident in many activities carried out by the museum and is accomplished through a variety of means. It includes educational, cultural and scientific activities, as well as those related to expanding the collections of the institution.

In terms of the museum's visual communication with regard to this aspect, the permanent and temporary exhibitions play an important role. The permanent exhibition is the first exhibition in Poland telling the story of emigration from the Polish territories during the last 200 years in such an extensive way. It depicts the experiences of people leaving their homeland, their fears, hopes, as well as the causes and consequences of emigration. It is a story of people setting off on a journey into the unknown, of civilization and economic changes that they experienced, of the legend of Gdynia and the Polish ocean liners. It is a story of outstanding Polish emigrants – people well-known abroad, but frequently forgotten in their homeland, and a story of the Polish diaspora – people cultivating the culture and tradition of the country of their ancestors. An undeniably important component of its narrative layer is the story of the Polish identity and of its many faces.

The theme of the Polish and the Polish diaspora identity is also an integral part of the temporary exhibitions prepared by the museum. Examples include such exhibitions as: "Poles in the Canadian Mosaic. 150 years of history" (2017) (an exhibition in a modified form was also presented in Canada), "Carboland. History of the Polish emigrants who went to work in the coal mines in France and Belgium in 1919–1939" or "Klimaks" (telling the story of the relationship between man and his environment from the perspective of Polish emigration to South America at the turn of the 20th century).

A special example of cultivating a Polish identity are the museum's genealogical workshops and consultations, which are quite popular among representatives of the Polish diaspora, along with the public. The activities are implemented in the form of webinars, which are designed to make the participants fully aware of the importance of family history – learning about it and preserving it. During these sessions,

participants have the opportunity to discover their own roots – as they gain knowledge of genealogy in theory and in practice. The program covers the step-by-step process of discovering one’s roots and a presentation of useful genealogy databases, portals and programs. During the meetings, special attention is paid to the history of emigration, trying to find answers to the question of where and what documentation to look for regarding the ancestors who left Poland. The workshop enables participants to gain knowledge about the work of a genealogist, the challenges of extending a family tree and the principles of conducting a search for ancestors.

## Conclusion

Culture and cultural activities are now an important part of the so-called “soft power” of both states and national communities. The sphere of culture, along with identity and reference to a shared past (history), undoubtedly constitutes one of the most important elements of community, determining the individual and collective sense of belonging.

Culture as the glue that binds members of the diaspora to the societies of their countries of origin should occupy an important place within the framework of diaspora policies formulated by the state authorities. In this regard, it is important that cultural institutions are skillfully integrated into the scope of these policies, being their important actors, whose main task should be to build symbolic and identity ties within communities divided by borders. In doing so however, it is important to keep in mind the need to respect the autonomy of these types of institutions, which should not be exposed to direct political influence and reduced to captive tools for the realization of short-sighted political goals and interests of specific ruling groups. State authorities, as in the case of many other activities aimed at developing cooperation with the diaspora, should act as a facilitator of specific solutions, projects and programs, rather than as their direct implementing agent, primarily setting general guidelines and offering financial support.

In terms of forging relations with the diaspora, in the symbolic and identity dimensions, a special place falls to emigration museums, as institutions specialized in commemorating emigrant history as well as the current emigrant situation, and building bridges between the societies of the countries of origin and the diasporas. Contemporary migrant museums can wield a great deal of influence in this aspect, realizing or broadcasting their activities in virtual space; inviting members of the diaspora to their headquarters; as well as showcasing their projects abroad.

In Poland, a cultural institution that, despite limited financial resources and a relatively small staff, has quite significant potential for forging symbolic and identity ties with the Polish diaspora is the Emigration Museum in Gdynia.

The Emigration Museum’s activities and offerings are aimed not only at people living in Poland, but also at the members of the Polish diaspora scattered around

the world. The museum strives to address and present the themes of migration and diaspora in a multi-thread and multifaceted way, implementing educational, research, artistic and cultural projects and initiatives, as well as those related to gathering collections or recording individual fates and experiences by means of oral history.

Gdynia's cultural institution develops symbolic and identity relations between Polish society and the Polish diaspora through initiatives covering all six key areas identified by Dahlgren and Hermes, quoted many times in this text, i.e., values, knowledge, trust, space, practices and identity. Most importantly, the museum sees the diaspora as an important partner, seeking to involve its members and Polish organizations in its activities.

In the eight years of its operation, the Emigration Museum in Gdynia has become one of the most frequently visited cultural institutions in the Pomorskie Voivodeship and a significant institution on the cultural map of Poland. It addresses its educational, exhibition and cultural initiatives to people of all ages, from the very young to the elderly. It is a place open to all visitors and an institution confidently taking part in the debate on the challenges of the modern world, such as climate migration, migration stereotypes, migration of highly skilled people, or the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. Above all, it undertook the challenging task of integrating the communities of the descendants of the Polish emigrants, Poles living at home and abroad, and immigrants arriving in Poland.

According to Dahlgren and Hermes (2015: 134), contemporary museums must seek engagement by offering the right mix of aesthetics, experience, information and fun while maintaining a sense of community. The activities of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia fit this description of modern cultural institutions.

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