

Mariusz Kluczewski (State Archive in Cracow), Research in Polish archives – assumptions and execution

Against a backdrop of the river of Polish emigration to France, the Reich or across the ocean during the 19th and 20th centuries, those Poles who headed for Scandinavia barely represented a narrow offshoot of that river. Norway, or to the start of the 20th century, a part of the Kingdom of Norway and Sweden, constituted a small stream in this offshoot, which sometimes even appeared to be dry. Using this terminology, it should be added that there were seasons when this stream changed into a considerable river.

We set ourselves the task of checking how the archival materials which describe this process look. Based on these materials, can we ascertain how Poles learnt about Norway, as well as when and why they began to consider it as a place where they could settle? In our search, we selected several institutions from the network of state archives in Poland (the Archives of New Records, the Central Archives of Historical Records, the National Digital Archives, the State Archive in Bydgoszcz, the State Archive in Gdansk, the State Archive in Poznan, the State Archive in Suwalki, the State Archive in Szczecin, the State Archive in Torun and the State Archive in Cracow). Our investigation into the tracks of emigration during the period of the People's Republic of Poland was also carried out in the records of the Institute of National Remembrance's branches in Cracow, Katowice and Wroclaw.

For research purposes, we divided the last 200 years of Polish emigration to the Scandinavian peninsula, to Norway, into a few periods separated by important dramatic events in the history of the two nations.

The first period is from the 19th century to the end of World War I. We didn't expect to find any indicators of mass emigration to Scandinavia in the materials for these

years. Failed nationalist uprisings and poverty forced thousands of Poles to leave their homeland in search of a better life. However, on the land which later became part of the Kingdom of Norway, only the most determined individuals, forced by turmoil, arrived and settled on this harsh terrain. Traces of their activity can be found, above all, in Norwegian archives. Of course, the more active socially and professionally the emigrant was, the more materials can be found (for example, the photographs of Ludwik Szaciński, and the publications of Adam Dzwonkowski). In Polish archives, only short references to their lives by the Vistula can be found.

The next period consists of the inter-war years of the 20th century. While rebuilding itself, the Polish nation established diplomatic relations and economic links with, among others, Norway. Despite the fact that Poles continued to emigrate, this time caused to a large extent by economic factors, it can not be stated, based on the archives, that their chosen destination was Norway. The Polish diplomatic representatives there reported that there were no concentrations of Polish emigrants in their territory. Norway, with its climate and landscape, was by no means a dream destination for those Polish villagers emigrating in the 1920s and 1930s. It should be highlighted that Norway did become a popular place of exploration for Polish scientific expeditions and, during our research, interesting materials from these expeditions were found.

The next period is World War II and the years immediately after it. Due to its location, the neutral Norway quickly became an area of military activity for the rival powers. In the short, yet intensive, campaign Polish military units were among the participants. The Norwegian Campaign, as is well known, ended in a triumph for the III Reich, and the allied forces retreated to France and the British Isles. Poles, however, quickly began to arrive in Norway, but now as prisoners of war in the camps located there, as forced labour used to construct fortifications, and also as soldiers conscripted into the Wehrmacht. During our search, we came across materials illustrating the repatriation

process of these Poles. This was quite simple as the main acts of the institutions established to repatriate Poles from various countries after the end of the war – the State Repatriation Office and the General Attorney for Repatriation, are kept in the state archives. In one such document, which we publish, besides a description of the situation and moods, we find figures documenting the vast scale of repatriation, in addition to the particularly interesting information that, out of 16,178 people under the care of the Repatriation Mission, 2,008 decided to remain abroad. There is no confirmation, of course, that all of these resided in Norway after the war, however, some of them certainly did. Other documents confirm this.

The final defined period of Polish emigration to Norway is the second half of the 20th century. The fates of Poland and Norway ran different courses. Poland, under communist rule, sank into poverty, any kind of opposition was overpowered, and activists were arrested, persecuted or forced to emigrate. Norway, on the other hand, a stable member of the coalition of western nations, profited greatly from the exploitation of oil reserves in the North Sea and the Norwegian Sea. This black gold transformed this country of just 5 million inhabitants into one of the richest in Europe. The desire to improve living conditions must have played a role in people's willingness to settle there. During the course of our investigation, documents sent by Poles living in Norway to the “Polonia” Society were found. This institution's function was to maintain contact on behalf of the People's Republic of Poland's government with the Polonia around the world. These letters paint a picture of pain in Polish centres in Norway. In addition, a search through the acts of the Institute of National Remembrance found documents presenting the activity of the security services in communist Poland, as well as the reasons for and ways of escaping to a better world. Complementary to the archival documents from this period are interviews conducted with Poles who spent part of their lives living and working on Norwegian soil.