5. DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

An Uneven Friendship and Its Perception: The Holy Roman Empire and Poland in the Eyes of the Other's Chroniclers/Authors During the Middle Ages (10th-15th c.)

The project aims to collect and analyse the image of the Holy Roman Empire (Germany) and its people among Polish writers and (vice versa) of Poland and its people among German writers in the Middle Ages (10th-15th century). What did they think of their neighbour and in which contexts did they write about their neighbour?
The modern and general view of the notion of 'neighbour' (from Germany to Poland and the other way around) has been strongly influenced by the (often negative) common history of the two countries in the 19th/20th century and even nowadays new stereotypes continue to arise. The 'Germans' and the 'Poles' are often depicted as monolithic entities, with actual individual and regional identities shifted unfortunately into the background. National ties and attitudes have become stronger lately.

The relationships between the Holy Roman Empire and Poland during the Middle Ages were for long periods peaceful and friendly, based on diplomatic, matrimonial and economic exchanges.
The project aims to draw an alternative picture to the modern one, which weighs heavily on the mutual perception. The project will not try to replace the modern often shameful and painful history between the two (which must never be forgotten). Yet nevertheless there was a mutual history of over 500 years in the Middle Ages, which has been strongly overshadowed by the more recent history or is even not taken into consideration in both societies. This mutual perception from the medieval period has its own value and it deserves to be remembered as well.

The picture and perception of the 'other', of the neighbour, is not easy to access and grasp. Nowadays there is a bundle of starting points (art, social media, literature etc.) whereas in the Middle Ages the access is limited. Nonetheless one can analyse letters of individuals (though the number of them increased only in the late Middle Ages) or constitutional acts, that involved the neighbour (which also increased more so in the late Middle Ages). A good and common way to approach the issue would be by narrative texts (mainly chronicles, but also hagiographical material, such as *vitae* of saints). In these texts we come upon individual perceptions and assessments of the neighbour. Obviously they are not objective and neutral. But that is not necessary, because the project deals rather with a blurred and fuzzy picture of the neighbour. No one can expect a picture of the neighbour, which can be measured exactly – neither in the Middle Ages, nor nowadays. We can catch impressions of the authors rather than the 'reality'. But the impressions often became 'collective traditions' (sometimes still actively present in our times, e.g. the story of Wanda and the German emperor, which can be traced back to Vincent Kadłubek); at times the authors invented a mutual history, which later was taken to be supposedly 'solid knowledge'.

The project will undertake a thorough analyse of around 25-30 texts and then investigate additional texts using modern search methods and keywords in big-data-material. The public of both countries should care about the results of the project, because – whatever comes out – it will offer an important and ground-breaking supplement to the mutual picture, which consciously and unconsciously exists among both Germans and Poles. Surprisingly, when preparing the project, the applicant became aware that there exists a lot of publication on the mutual contacts and perceptions of Germany / Poland, Germans / Poles in the 19th/20th century, but nearly none for the medieval times. The project wants to change that on both sides – Germany and Poland. The goal of the project is to present a good, solid methodologically modern overview on the topic. That will consist of mainly narrative material. These quotes or opinions of medieval authors are interesting, because they transport in a very tangible way perceptions of the neighbour. That might come to be useful for the public sector, because print media, writers, exhibition organizers or artists cannot only rely on the results of this research and use it for their project, but they can as well easily search in the quoted material for nice stories and anecdotes about the neighbour.