

C 1- Description for the general public

This project is a study of one small-town Jewish community of Lower Silesia, Dzierżoniów, in the first five years after the Holocaust. Dzierżoniów was a unique town, where in July 1946 Jews constituted almost 50% of its population and their percentage among the general population until 1950 never dropped below 20%, making it a unique town in the landscape of post-Holocaust Poland and Europe. By focusing a microhistorical lens on one particular community, this project aims to cast new light and provide new explanations of a few large historical processes. These include: the construction and demise of so-called Jewish autonomy in post-Holocaust Poland in 1945-1950; the dynamics of the relations between new centers of the Jewish world (USA, Palestine/Israel) and the former Polish center; the evolution the Cold War in the context of transnational Jewish politics, changes in Jewish social structure, the expulsion of the German population and the polonization of Lower Silesia; and finally, the dynamics and character of Jewish attitudes towards the new political system being installed in Poland.

The project will scrutinize sources stored in various Polish archives and libraries, as well as thus far largely under-researched sources located in Israeli, US and British institutions, composed in various languages: Polish, Hebrew, Yiddish, English, Russian and German. This project represents a form of reaction to the peculiar marginalization of Polish-Jewish history after the Holocaust. On the one hand, today this research is usually limited to the problems of anti-Semitism or the Jewish relationship to communism. This kind of perspective is limited to the rather insufficient and narrow margins of political history, in which Jews are mostly regarded as a passive element of the story. On the other hand, in Polish as well as Israeli, American and other historiographies, the history of the Jews in post-1945 Poland is not researched from the perspective of the central problems of Jewish historiography of the second half of the 20th century, such as the evolution of Jewish transnationalism, professionalization, metropolization and the fading away of modernist and ideological political paradigms. Finally, novelty of this project lies in one of its central research questions, until today not investigated by the scholarship. Were there any continuities of centuries old pre-Holocaust Polish-Jewish civilization in the life of Polish Jews under the communism?