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IN THE SPIRIT OF THE HOMO VIDENS ERA: DIGITAL HUMANITIES DATABASES AND THEIR POTENTIAL FOR EDUCATION

Abstract: The Author discusses the impact of the “homo videns” era on education, emphasizing the importance of visual literacy in a society increasingly dominated by images. She argues that the ability to analyze and interpret visual narratives critically is essential for students at all educational levels. Integrating visual thinking methods and documentary photography into the curriculum is necessary to enhance the effectiveness of teaching humanities and to adapt to the changing communication landscape shaped by media. The article highlights the historical significance of documentary photography in social reform, referencing influential figures like Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis, who used their work to advocate for labor rights and social change. The Author also explores the philosophical and semiotic dimensions of photography, suggesting that it serves as a cultural text that conveys historical context and societal values. The potential of photography as an educational tool is further reinforced by the availability of digital archives and social archives, which can enrich the learning experience and foster critical analytical skills among students. Finally, the author addresses the legal aspects of using visual materials in education, particularly concerning copyright laws and the importance of understanding Creative Commons licenses. She emphasizes the role of social archives in preserving local history and promoting civic engagement, while also pointing to various digital resources available to educators. By leveraging these tools and methodologies, educators can create innovative learning experiences that engage students in the exploration of history and culture through visual media. The text discusses a teaching method where a teacher provides a camera to students, encouraging them to photograph their social realities. This approach, sometimes used interchangeably with photo elicitation, allows students to select images that reflect their experiences and document specific social phenomena. The resulting photographic documentation should be well-planned and relevant for social or historical research. Teachers can offer guidance similar to that of Roy Striker or Charles Suchar, focusing on a central research question. This method can be adapted for various age groups and skill levels, serving as a foundation for education on social processes and self-evaluation of teaching practices.



Keywords: photography, social archives, informal education projects, homo videns

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INTRODUCTION

In education, as in every area of social life, we face the challenges of the homo videns era or the so-called pictorial turn. The role of media and image-centered communication is currently extremely important, and the ability to deconstruct, assign meanings, and critically evaluate visual narratives is becoming a fundamental skill for students at every stage of education. The image occupies an equal place alongside text/print or oral communication in social communication. Visual thinking methods are commonly used in teaching; thus, documentary photography becomes a cultural text used to convey a broad historical context. The media generation and its language of communication must be implemented in school practice so that the effectiveness of humanistic education achieves satisfactory results.

Giovanni Sartori introduced the term homo videns into the scientific circulation in 1997. Sartori (2007: 26–30) analyzing the multimedia revolution and its impact on human culture, including the spheres of politics and democracy. According to the researcher, television, as a tool, created a new type of man and postformal thinking based on the cult of the image. Documentary photography or photographic documentation is defined in various ways in academic debate. In Europe, significant voices shaped the debate as early as the 1920s. In the 20th century, John Grierson (considered the creator of the term documentary) was at the forefront. Reflection was created in Poland by Jan Mieczysławski or Władysław Strzemiński. The philosophical and semiotic significance of documentary nature in photographic representation is owed to Charles Peirce's theory, which distinguished three types of signs: iconic, indexical, and symbolic (Leśniak, 2010; Zarembska-Szatan, 2016). According to this reflection, photography as a representation of reality is characterized by its iconic and indexical nature. The usefulness of photography in studying social processes dates back to the beginning of the 20th century – the works of Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis at the beginning of the 20th century, and the photographers from the Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information (FSA/

OWI) in the United States in the 1930s. The collection provides a comprehensive record of American life from 1935 to 1944. Photographs by sociologist Lewis Hine during the Progressive Era and the Great Depression documented the work of young children in difficult conditions. As a social document, they played a role in the process of modernization and the development of the first child labor law in the United States. Jacob Riis was a sociologist of Danish origin working in the USA, who was a pioneer of photojournalism. He documented life in New York slums. He advocated for social support programs, healthcare reform, and labor law. He first presented his proposals in 1889 in the article 'How the Other Half Lives' in the magazine *Scribner's* (Riis, 1889).

In public collections and digital archives of state and social institutions, we have visual material that can be of interest to, among others, art, cultural, political, social and economic history respectively, as well as other sciences such as visual ethnography, visual sociology, cultural anthropology, and media studies. Also important are the fields that develop available databases and their methodologies, such as archival science, museology or conservation. We are not only witnessing an intensified scientific debate in Poland concerning archival science but we also see many interdisciplinary research projects focused on the challenges of technological progress and the growing expectations of users (Chorążyczewski and Rosa, 2021: 9–158). The initiatives listed below are of significant importance for the potential use of photography in the educational process and for increasing analytical skills among students, however they also provide an opportunity for teachers to respond to the cultural change of *homo videns*. This is not about the educational activities of the archive, but about using visual materials from the available open collections as basic sources and the possibility of including them in the educational process.

The key question is what open access instruments are dedicated to the student to develop critical thinking and historical analysis skills, and how we can apply them in the classroom. The contemplation of visual documents is currently embedded in both theory and practice of digital archiving. Photography can serve as a tool for exploring and understanding the world as well as helping students develop critical thinking skills. The use of the visual document analysis method in the classroom requires the teacher/educator to know the law and must be used based on the highest principles of ethics. It is necessary to analyze normative acts and the concept of public domain. This article aims to review, analyze the content, and propose the use of visual databases in the educational process in pri-

mary and secondary schools in the Polish education system in accordance with the core curriculum. The research method is a comparative analysis of digital humanities databases in Poland, analysis of the substantive content and methods of including local archives in the social movement, and analysis of legal acts that provide a basis for the possibility of their application in educational practice. In the era of digital tools, the digitization of archival resources has become a social movement in the public third sector, and as such, at the local level, it is the right direction for the activation of the younger generation.

VISUAL METHODS IN EDUCATION: PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography as an iconographic source in historical education is mainly viewed as a historical document, often ignoring the aesthetic value inherent in a work of art and emphasizing creative practice. However, we should remember that such an expanded approach aligns with Hans Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic theory on the process of understanding, historical explanation, and the role of the individual in history, especially concerning the interpretation of cultural and artistic works and the meaning of history. It recognizes the ambiguity of broadly understood cultural texts and the metaphorical nature of communication and transmission forms. Importantly, our speech reflects the social world we live in and our interaction with tradition. The form and content of the message are inseparable; therefore, the hermeneutic model of knowledge is universal, and the world's meaning is revealed through language (Zwoliński, 2005: 254–256). As a cultural text, photography combines aesthetic qualities and a historical view of social life, serving as a source of historical information that complements “textual” sources. It captures elements related to non-verbal communication and the epoch's tradition of being. Especially with images documenting significant historical events, photography shows its subjects in key relationships: a person within the social world, a politician within the system hierarchy, an individual within the state and its value system. Interpretation depends on the viewer's humanistic knowledge and aesthetic sensitivity. Thus, the dialogue surrounding photography should be ongoing, raising new questions following Gadamer's theory and exploring fresh avenues of answers. Viewing a single image, a moment frozen in history as if outside of space and time, can become an on-

going process, linking effectively to various educational levels, enhancing students' knowledge, skills, and critical thinking. Photography shifts from merely reflecting reality to becoming an object of symbolic and subjective interpretation. Digital archives and social memory projects will play an important role in this kind of education.

The young generation of digital natives (the concept of digital natives and digital immigrants by Derrick de Kerckhove (1996: 21–210) and Marc Prensky (2001), living in the era of iconic orientation of culture and the conditions of the network's hypertext node, are characterized by a different way of thinking and seeing. Instead of the concept or abstract, a symbol appears, instead of linear, cause-and-effect reasoning – a mosaic of facts, artifacts and experiences. The phenomenon of language transformation carries a risk. It directs the recipient towards interpretativeness, intensified pragmatism of meanings and meanings interpreted from a specific use (Skudrzyk, 2013: 157). As a result, the symbol is susceptible to imaginative distortion and the process of falsification, and becomes a tool of propaganda. Therefore, it is so important to introduce documentary photography or film into the didactic process and education in the method of critical analysis of the visual source.

The potential of interpreting historical photography for historians serves as a simple example or as a conclusion to the discussed topic. It can also function as a reproductive tool or a historical source, especially when other sources are lacking (Burke, 2001: 10; Barzycka, 2006: 106). I will omit a lengthy discussion about the classification of the concept of iconographic sources in history. Still, it is worth noting that photography is a technological innovation reliant on chemical processes and manual skills since its inception, reflecting the synchronization of the image with the time of its creation. Photography has specific cognitive functions as a visual document or an ontological affirmation of a phenomenon. In Roland Barthes' reflection, the noema of photography means "what was"; it is a manifestation of reality, a testimony of time, and a reflection of the historical moment (Barzycka, 2006: 108–109). In this sense, it lacks the feature of post-reflexivity, if we disregard contemporary possibilities of correction, technical interference, or even falsification of photography (I leave techniques of distortion and their purposes outside the scope of this article). Photography, as an iconographic source, unlike earlier traditional art forms, is a direct record of the era and social context. It provides a complete image, independent of the photographer's intentions, relying only on light as an objective factor (J.F.W. Herschel, photography, or "drawing with light"). Therefore, it should also be incorporated into education.

Analyzing the role of photography in social sciences, its creator and researcher Çeyiz Makal Fairclough (2018: 111–113) draws attention to the issues of authenticity and truth, as well as the subjectivity of the photographer's and the viewer's field of vision. Drawing on Howard Becker's work, the author suggests a rigorous approach to identifying relevant questions and possible answers, rather than questioning the so-called truth of the visual document, which suggests consideration of the credibility of the source. The threats to access, artistic intentions, potential for photo manipulation and staging, photographer's theory, censorship, as well as editing are all important. These issues should be considered by all photographers involved in sociological research. Moreover, the material is subject to subjectification on the part of both the researcher and the creator. Stella Bruzzi addresses the concepts of truth and representation in documentary work, demonstrating that as a representation of reality, visual document does not lose its credibility due to distortions. The recipient is aware that the result of creative work is the outcome of negotiation and interpretation, and that the people being photographed are always aware of the presence of the camera. However, this does not pose a threat to credibility (Bruzzi, 2000: 2–39).

Photography in education can serve special functions, including illustrative, communicative (at the meta level), documentary, creative, cultural, representative, and research tool (Barzycka, 2006: 110–111). Photography is a communication in itself; however, it is an important part of the system of social communication and as such can be a starting point for critical analysis of historical events. In the chronicle dimension, it is also part of a political message and, consequently, ideological propaganda. This also results in its myth-making, symbolic, and cultural function, which is reflected in public and private life practices. In the teaching of history and social studies, photography in the era of image culture is therefore a source of knowledge about the development of social and political processes. Reading images, just like reading text, is a fundamental competence of the humanities and social sciences, and assigning meaning and interpreting an image depends on understanding the action that is taking place in real time (Berger and Sikora, 1999: 75; Barzycka, 2006: 114).

COPYRIGHT AND THE USE OF DIGITAL MATERIALS IN EDUCATION

Photography as a work is covered by copyright belonging to the intellectual property rights collection. On the one hand, they protect the creator; on the other hand, the people or architectural works documented in the photo. Some rules allow the use of visual sources in education, and teachers and students should be aware of them. The government website of the Ministry of Digital Affairs on digital competences provides legal definitions of Creative Commons (CC) licenses and outlines their practical application in educational settings (*'Rozwój kompetencji cyfrowych...'*, 2025).

The principles of copyright law in Poland are defined by the Act on Copyright and Related Rights of 4 February 1994 (Dz.U. 1994, No 24, item 83). The rules are supplemented by, among others, the Directive of the European Parliament and the Council (EU) 2019/790 on copyright in the Digital Single Market (OJEU 2019/790), which defines the rules for educational fair use and licenses for digital content. Executive and legal acts, including domestic and foreign conventions, were posted on the <http://www.prawoautorskie.gov.pl/> website run by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (*'Prawo autorskie i medialne'* 2025). Bearing in mind the significant amendments, it should be noted that on 20.9.2024, most of the provisions of the Act of 26.7.2024 on amending the Act on Copyright and Related Rights, the Act on the Protection of Databases and the Act on Collective Management of Copyright and Related Rights entered into force (Dz.U. 2024, item 1254). The provisions adapt national law to EU regulations, as the burning issue of remuneration for creators for the use of their works on the Internet was recognized. Currently, royalties for the exploitation of an audio-visual work are paid through organizations for the collective management of copyright or related rights (Dz.U. 1994, No 24, item 83: Art. 70: 3), and new rules of liability of online platforms for content made available by their users have been introduced (*'Nowe prawo...'*, 2024). This is a supplement to the existing moral and economic copyrights. In the case of photography, the work is protected in its entirety, and the author may stipulate that the work must retain its content and form. Moral rights are unlimited in time and inalienable. Economic copyrights are valid for the entire life of the author and 70 years after his death

or 70 years from the date of the first dissemination of the work if the author is unknown. The author may transfer economic copyrights to another entity or person.

We fully utilize the opportunities provided by the so-called public domain in education. Under this license, works are not protected by copyright, they are published in open access, and the recipient can freely copy, modify, creating commercial educational tools. Works enter the public domain automatically 70 years after the death of the author, or when the author decides to waive their copyright (CC0 – Creative Commons Zero symbol). Creative Commons is a licensing system under which authors share their works on certain terms, i.e.:

- CC BY: the material can be used provided that the author is credited (attribution);
- CC BY-SA: You may use the material, provided that you attribute it and share it under the same license.
- CC BY-NC: Material may be used for non-commercial purposes only, with attribution.
- CC BY-ND: Material can be used without modification, with attribution ('No Copyright', 2024).

It is worthwhile to utilize the so-called Open Educational Resources, which are source material databases of various types designed for teachers and students at all levels of education. Such platforms include, among others, Khan Academy, the resources of the Polish Internet Library, the Polish Open Educational Resources Platform, and Wikimedia Commons.

In the copyright collection, we note exceptions to its application, namely: the right of quotation and permitted educational use. According to Article 27 of the copyright law, educational institutions may use works for teaching and research purposes, both in the original forms and translation, and disseminate works, including making copies of fragments of disseminated works for these purposes. Article 28 provides additional possibilities for libraries, archives, and schools while Article 29 outlines the limits of the right to quote. Teachers and students have the right to use them under certain assumptions without the need to obtain the author's consent. Quotation that is justified by the context must be proportional to its purpose. The principle guides the amount of material that can be quoted. It is necessary to cite the author and sources of the work. In cases of educational use, teachers at any educational institution in Poland are authorized to use works as part of teaching activities without obtaining the author's consent, free of charge, provided that the work is used for edu-

cational, scientific or research purposes (reproduction, presentation, adaptation as part of the teaching process). The condition is the educational context, non-commercial use, in a closed circle of recipients with the rules of quotation and proper citation of sources (*'Rozwój kompetencji cyfrowych...'*, 2025).

An educational institution, as defined by the Education Act, is an organizational unit such as: kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, art schools, educational and educational institutions, including youth hostels, lifelong learning institutions and vocational training centers, art centers, psychological and pedagogical counseling centers, youth educational and sociotherapy centers, teacher training institutions, pedagogical libraries, and entities that are part of higher education (Dz.U. 2017, item 59: Art. 2: 1–11; Dz.U. 2018, item 1668: Art. 3: 1–11): universities, PAN scientific institutes, research institutes. No other entities, despite also being involved in education, have the right to use the institution of permitted educational use. It is worth remembering that foundations offering additional lessons as part of school or extracurricular activities are not covered by the right to fair use for educational purposes.

According to Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Copyright Act, in addition to other types of works, an architectural, architectural-urbanistic, or urbanistic work can also be protected (Dz.U. 1994, No 24, item 83: Art. 1: 2). A unique aspect of Polish copyright law concerning photography is the right of panorama (the so-called freedom of panorama), which pertains to the documentation of architectural works. This represents one of the forms of permitted use of protected works, meaning it is allowed to use works covered by copyright needing the author's permission. Under the panorama law, based on Article 33, point 1 of the aforementioned act, it is permitted to distribute works that are permanently displayed outdoors, such as on public roads, streets, squares, or in gardens, but not for the same purpose repeatedly (Dz.U. 1994, No 24, item 83: Art. 33: 1). Consequently, it is lawful to photograph these objects and share images, including in educational settings. However, legal experts generally agree that works covered by the panorama right should be located in open, accessible spaces, not indoors. It also does not apply to buildings that are not visible or are hidden (fenced off). For historical monuments, it is important to remember that economic copyright typically expires 70 years after the creator's death. After this period, the work enters the public domain, allowing anyone to use it for commercial or non-commercial purposes (*'Prawo panoramy...'*, 2023).

SOCIAL ARCHIVING IN POLAND AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR EDUCATION

The archive, especially the social digital archive, currently plays a key educational and modernizing role in the process of creating a civic social movement for the preservation of local memory and the development of regional history. **The Center for Social Archives** in Poland is a unique entity in terms of its origin and *modus operandi* (*Centrum Archiwistyki Społecznej*, 2025). It was born out of a grassroots, activist initiative and works towards creating a stable network of units cooperating in the field of archiving local history, without formal restrictions. It was established as a cultural institution in 2020, thanks to the commitment of the Karta Center Foundation and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, to develop and support social archiving in the form of a nationwide civic movement. In this sense, the institution's perspective includes libraries, cultural centers, non-governmental organizations (foundations and associations), and informal initiative groups, all of which have equal status. The movement should be a complementary element to archival science in the system of public state institutions. A social archive understood in this way is local in nature, collecting and sharing artifacts related to a specific location, group, or topic. Many initiatives also carry out activities in the field of oral history, collecting and archiving alongside documents, photos, and material artifacts, so-called oral testimonies of history or interviews. Photographs, graphics, period documents, and recordings can be found on the dedicated website: zbioryspoleczne.pl (2025). Teachers will find both substantive support (dedicated textbooks for social archivists and oral history, lesson plans, online courses), developmental support (workshops, training, applications for managing a social archive), and a resource database in open access from all over Poland.

The consolidation of activities in the field of social archiving was the result of experience. In Poland, according to data from **the KARTA Center**, collected from 2012 to 2018, at least 460 entities are collecting archival materials for local history, social history, cultural history, and other topics that are not adequately represented in state archives (*Ośrodek Karta*, 2025). These entities were funded on a point-by-point basis, depending on grants, volunteer work, and the efforts of enthusiasts. They were always established based on grassroots initiative (Ziętał, 2018). In the next part of

the article, I will analyze the usefulness and characteristic features of some projects, as well as examples of the use of photography in social projects that promote local history.

DIGITAL HUMANITIES ARCHIVES

The digital humanities open-access database is being systematically developed across a network of horizontal state and social institutions, in proportion to advances in technological capabilities. In Poland, at the national level, we have several audiovisual archives in the public domain. The primary national audiovisual database useful in education at all levels is *Ninateka*, the VOD service of the National Film Archive of the Audiovisual Institute. It hosts over 4000 audio and video files that document Polish culture and film history, along with current collections from *Filmoteka Narodowa – Instytut Audiowizualny* (the *National Film Archive – Audiovisual Institute*, FINA) after the digitization and digital reconstruction process (*Ninateka*, 2025). *Ninateka* protects copyrights, making materials available both free of charge and for a fee. The *Ninateka* license allows User to access the collection at their preferred time and place via streaming technology (video on demand) or live streaming, without the ability to download, record, or duplicate content, and prohibits its use for any commercial or economic activity. However, certain works will be available for offline playback in mobile applications ('Regulamin i licencje', 2025). FINA is a broad audiovisual collection that, in addition to film and theater art, presents posters, stills, books, costume and set design projects, etc. (*Filmoteka Narodowa – Instytut Audiowizualny*, 2025). However, let us remember that according to the user's regulations,

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The rights to the materials contained in the Portal belong to the Service Provider or its contractors. The aforementioned materials are presented based on agreements concluded with third parties, mainly agreements transferring property rights to copyright, or license agreements, or based on generally applicable legal regulations. Unless otherwise specified for

each of the materials contained in the Portal, by using the Portal, Users do not acquire any rights to the materials contained in it, including no license to share the mentioned materials, and their use is limited exclusively to the permitted use defined in Article 23 of the Copyright and Related Rights Act (Terms of Use of the FINA Internet Portal). The article deals with the permitted use of protected works.

The Copyright and Related Rights Act (Dz.U. 1994, No 24, item 83: Art. 23: 1) permitted use of protected works. The creator's permission is not required to use a work that has already been disseminated for personal use. This provision does not authorize the construction of another's architectural or architectural-urbanistic work or the use of electronic databases that meet the characteristics of a work, unless it is for personal scientific use unrelated to a commercial purpose. 2. The scope of personal use includes the use of individual copies of works by a circle of persons in a personal relationship, in particular kinship, affinity or social relationship (Dz.U. 1994, No 24, item 83: Article 23: 1). The creator's permission is not required for temporary reproduction, of a temporary or incidental nature, without independent economic significance, and constituting an integral and necessary part of the technological process, the purpose of which is only to enable the transmission of a work in a teleinformatic system between third parties by an intermediary or the lawful use of a work (Dz.U. 1994, No 24, item 83: Art. 23: 2.1). Radio and television organizations are allowed to use their own means to record works for the purpose of their own broadcasts. 2. The recordings referred to in paragraph 1 are destroyed within one month from the date of expiration of the right to broadcast the work. 3. The provision of paragraph 2 does not apply to recordings that are archival materials that enter the national archival resource.

In the field of photography, the largest collection is held by *Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe* (the National Digital Archive, NAC; *Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe*, 2025), which plans to reach a staggering 200 million digital photos of Polish history as well as political and social life by 2030. The collections are systematically updated and come from all over Poland, including historical items (e.g., archival materials from the so-called eastern borderlands). The NAC was established in 2008 as a result of the transformation of the Mechanical Documentation Archive and was focused on the advancement of recording and data sharing technology. The collection consists of photographs, sound recordings, films, and files both in traditional and electronic forms. NAC conducts educational activities and

promotes the idea of digital archives in Poland. Importantly, on the web-site <http://www.szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl>, the National Archives of Poland publishes only digital copies of archival materials that are in the public domain or for which the State Treasury holds the economic rights and the National Archives of Poland is authorized to publish them or has obtained a relevant license from the owner of the economic rights (*Szukaj w Archiwach...*, 2025).

Beyond state institutions, an important open tool in a teacher's work is *Wikimedia Commons* (2025). Created since September 7, 2004, the collection currently has 115,425,392 freely used multimedia files, to which everyone can contribute. This repository is for various Wikimedia Foundation projects, in which photographs, video and audio files, or 3D models are placed in the public domain.

The resources are created by volunteers. As a result, it is a unique tool that fully activates school youth, who can download files by the principles of copyright ethics, and also able to create and supplement the resources themselves. Annual open encyclopaedic competitions, such as Wiki Loves Monuments, Wiki Loves Folklore, monthly photographic challenge, or dedicated school actions that can be carried out locally with the substantive support of *Wikimedia Polska* (2025), can serve this purpose. The repository is free and publicly available. As stated on the project's website, each user can freely copy, use, and modify any of the files, so long as they comply with the terms specified by the author. The condition is to properly record the source and the author (or authors) and to issue copies/visions under the same freedom for others. The license terms of each multimedia file can be found on the description page.

Wikimedia Commons is also unique in terms of content. Since 2012, one hundred thousand digitized images from the National Archives and Records Administration have been included in the collection. Since 2018, 3D models have become a novelty. According to the Wikimedia Foundation, one of the earliest reconstructions was the visualization of the statue of the Lion Al-Leta in Palmyra, Syria, which was severely damaged by ISIS in 2015. Since 2020, Wikimedia Commons has been cooperating with the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). The project also cooperates with the Europeana initiative, an EU portal promoting the digitized cultural heritage of Europe (*Wikimedia Polska*, 2025; 'Wikimedia Commons', 2025).

In the Polish industry's third sector, we also note *Wirtualne Muzeum Fotografii* (Virtual Museum of Photography; *Wirtualne Muzeum Fotografii*, 2025). This is a database of photos (over 50,000) and knowledge about

Polish photography, including its artistic aspects. The website allows for free viewing of scans from archives compiled by the Foundation for Photography Archaeology, the Jewish Historical Institute, the Magnetic Field Foundation, the Film and Photography Foundation, and the Droga Photojournalists Association. WMF is a SPA (Single Page Application) application, prepared based on the latest web technologies. The photos are mostly shared under the Creative Commons 3.0 license (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 PL – attribution, non-commercial, free use, no derivative works). Non-commercial use is free of charge, but it is a prerequisite that you sign the authorship, in accordance with the information on the object card regarding copyright. The works cannot be modified (*Wirtualne Muzeum Fotografii*, 2025).

It is worth mentioning foreign initiatives focused on key historical research problems of the 20th century. *The Arolsen Archives – International Center on Nazi Persecution* [Arolsen Archives – Międzynarodowe Centrum Prześladowań Nazistowskich] based in Germany is committed to commemorating Nazi persecution, the crimes of the Holocaust, and its consequences for the post-war period (*Arolsen Archives...*, 2025). The Archive conducts campaigns to disseminate knowledge about Nazi crimes, including international projects, exhibitions, and information campaigns, as well as broadly understood publishing activities, including scientific ones. It contains 50 million reference cards with information about 17.5 million people. The online archive focuses on several leading topics, such as displaced persons (a post-war collection that includes documents like questionnaires from the International Organization for Migration). Refugees (IRO), often with photos of individuals), concentration camps, ghettos, Nazi penal institutions (collection of personal documents about individual prisoners, especially extensive, from Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps) and so-called special collections (including photos of all personal belongings). The Archive enters into strategic partnerships with scientific units to implement new methodological approaches and to explore the archival potential. It leads research seminars for students, as well as seminars and workshops for young scientists. As they write, the key topics of the Arolsen Archives collection are the history of concentration camps and concentration camp prisoners, in particular, the persecution of the police at the local level, and the deportation of the Jewish population, the exploitation of foreign forced laborers, the care and support of displaced persons after 1945, the emigration and later life of survivors, compensation issues, as well as the history of searches for missing victims (*Arolsen Archives...*, 2025).

There are several initiatives at the level of the countries of the former people's democracy bloc, including the Romanian project of the National Archives of Romania Online communism photo collection, which contains documents on the history of Romanian communism: *Fototeca online a comunismului românesc* ('Online Photo Collection', 2025). The online project of a collection of photographs from the communist era was implemented in 2007 in response to the increased public interest and due to the unavailability of photographic sources from that period. On November 14, 2008. The National Archives of Romania and the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes in Romania have signed a cooperation agreement to create an online collection of communist era photographs, which is the first and largest Romanian free database containing images from 1945–1989 and 1921–1944, available on the Internet. Thousands of photographs in various formats from various organizations of the communist state are found in the repositories of the State Archives, most of the collections coming from various sources including the archives of the former Institute of the History of the Communist Party (Institute of Historical and Political Studies), as well as the collections of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu respectively. This unique material consists of photographs from the illegal meetings of communists, portraits from their youth, and photographs from the prisons where communist leaders were imprisoned. Most of the photographs are from the period 1944–1989: the entry of the Red Army into Bucharest, political events from 1944–1947, visits of some foreign communist leaders, aspects of the private life of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu, official visits to the country, communist party congresses, cultural congresses, nominations of communists to various positions, manifestos, meetings, official portraits, public events, etc. ('Online Photo Collection', 2025).

A special example is the *Open Society Archives* (OSA, Central European University; *Blinken Osa Archivum*, 2025) archival collection. Founded in 1995 as an archival and research institute, it deals with the history of communism, the Cold War, and documentation of contemporary human rights violations. The collection includes an extensive archive of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Research Institute, including documents on political, cultural, and countercultural personalities from the Cold War era to the present day. The series of publications of the Soviet, Polish, and Hungarian underground opposition is unique here, as are the records of the UN Expert Commission on Investigating

War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, Index on Censorship, Physicians for Human Rights, and the Open Society Foundations. Online collections that constitute the 1956 digital archive are particularly useful for implementing educational programs in history and social studies. This is a collection of texts, photos, and films about the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and its reception abroad. Scattered materials located in various institutions were gathered and placed in their original context. Thematic collections include RFE/RL files related to international issues from 1956. The Archive has also prepared thematic guides that combine documentation from several countries of popular democracies (*Blinken Osa Archivum*, 2025).

In the Baltic region, it is worth tapping into the resources of the Baltic countries, including the *National Archives of Estonia* (*Rahvus-Arhiiv*, 2025). The archive contains one of the most comprehensive collections of European life under communist rule. Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, as socialist republics, have been occupied by Soviet troops since 1940. In Estonia, a new political party of left-wing radicals seized power in a rigged election, and the first demand of the puppet Estonian government was to join the Soviet Union. The collections of the National Archives comprise 10 million records (the oldest dating back to 1240), approximately 36 million digital images online (about 5% of the collection), 12,000 online films (the oldest dating back to 1908), approximately 880,000 online photographs (the oldest dating back to the 19th century), and over 150,000 maps, approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of which are online (the oldest dating back to the first half of the 17th century). The collections can be found via the *AIS Archive Information System* (AIS, 2025).

In summary, let us consider the leading archival collection to be the one housed in the *Library of Congress* of the United States, which is the largest library in the world with millions of books, films and movies, audio recordings, photographs, newspapers, maps, and manuscripts in its collections (*Library of Congress*, 2025). This institution leads the way in the movement for digitalization and online access, strengthening the possibilities of cooperation for scientific research and increasing the resilience of societies in the area of reliable knowledge.

SOCIAL PROJECTS IN THE MOVEMENT FOR THE POPULARIZATION OF LOCAL HISTORY

The priority for teachers and educators is to use new technologies with a focus on various forms of knowledge transfer based on visual material. The goal is not to analyze the available solutions, but rather to show the range of possibilities as an inspiration for didactic research.

We have a long tradition of Polish projects that serve to popularize microhistory and deepen studies in regionalism, creatively utilizing visual material. Digital databases are an important source for education in the field of local history or socio-economic processes through the prism of regional studies. The '*Brama Grodzka - NN Theatre*' Centre [Ośrodek „Brama Grodzka - Teatr NN”] in Lublin, as a self-governing cultural institution working for the protection of cultural heritage and education, conducts activities in the scope of commemorating history by creating a social archive of the city, including its cultural diversity and the history of Jews in Poland (*Brama Grodzka...*, 2025). Her actions are a direct reference to the symbolic and historical significance of the Center's headquarters – Grodzka Gate, the passage between the Christian and Jewish cities. The institution's website features a Lexicon, which is an example of a visual archive employing the biographical method with a rich visual collection ('Leksykon', 2025), as well as a project of an oral history archive of special documentary significance. As part of the 'Oral History Archive – a project of the development and online availability of the most valuable resources', and selected witness accounts from the archive created by the 'Brama Grodzka - Teatr NN' Centre in Lublin for over 20 years were made available. The aim is to popularize oral history as a way of restoring memory, contributing to the increase of the resources of Polish cultural heritage ('Kolekcja. Historia mówiona', 2025). The educational materials include forms such as animated films, educational games, dedicated thematic digital documents, interviews, clips, and comics. The creativity of the authors uses communication formulas natural to the younger generation to effectively learn regional history. The universality of microhistory expressed in intercultural dialogue and the diversity of local heritage create the competences of the future, the resilience of society to social conflicts and disinformation in the area of historical policy in Central and Eastern Europe.

The social aspects of everyday space are presented by the *Association of Ethnographic Workshops* [Stowarzyszenie Pracownia Etnograficzna] project, entitled 'Finnish Houses', which promotes the local history of the Jazdów district in Warsaw (a colony of Finnish houses) (*Stowarzyszenie Pracownia Etnograficzna*, 2025; *Domki fińskie...*, 2025). Importantly, in addition to the outdoor exhibition and the urban game, the history of the colony was told by the residents themselves, who became the main narrators of the story.

We also note the involvement of witnesses to history, including Praga seniors, in another form the **Praga Gada** [Praga Talks] project, which is carried out in an attractive form to young people, as a comic created with the participation of well-known artists, including foreign ones (*Praga Gada*, 2025). As the project's creator, Przemysław Olszewski, writes,

the project initiated in 2010 involved recording conversations with seniors from Warsaw's Praga district and adapting them into a comic book format. *Archiwum Historii Mówionej* [The Oral History Archive] of the Animacja Foundation is an online audio library containing several hundred excerpts from approximately 150 interviews with residents of Praga. These excerpts are episodes from the lives of residents of the right-bank Warsaw from the interwar period to the 1980s (*Praga Gada*, 2025).

The project is a story of folklore, everyday life, economic and social aspects, in which one photo is only an invitation to in-depth studies of the biographies of Praga residents (inspired by the method of photo elicitation) (*Praga Gada*, 2025).

The social projects rebuild the symbolic space of communities that no longer exist and restore historical narratives silenced by regimes. In this way, they have a commemorative potential. The interdisciplinary project **Brest Stories Guide - Digital History Network** (2016) aims to preserve the memory of the destroyed Jewish community in Brest and develop innovative technologies in theater and cultural heritage (*Brest Stories Guide*, 2025). As we observe, the project served a consolidating role and was created at the intersection of art, tourism, and the commemoration of the city's cultural heritage.

About twenty people, including historians, representatives from Jewish organizations, and actors from the Brest's theaters, collaborated on the project. In 2016, the '**Kryly Khalopa**' theater (a Belarusian independent theater project operating since 2001; "*Kryly Khalopa*" theater, 2025) initiated the Brest Stories Guide project, presented in the form of a series of documentary audio performances in the urban space. The Brest Stories Guide

raises the issue of anti-Semitism and the liquidation of the Jewish community in Brest in 1941–1942. Before the war, the Jewish population in Brest was nearly 45% (around 24,000 Jews) and was completely annihilated. As a result of the Holocaust, repatriation, and Soviet anti-Semitism, the memory of the Jewish community and its contribution to the development of Brest practically disappeared from the city ('Brest Stories Guide', 2025). The application allows users to learn about the history of the lost symbolic space, for which the current urban infrastructure serves as a metaphorical stage. Similar projects were initiated, among others, in Gdańsk, where they illustrate the cultural diversity in history.

The method of describing photographs as a training proposal for teachers is exemplified by a Czech project that uses the method of narrating the history behind a single photograph – educational portal for students **HistoryLab** (*HistoryLab*, 2025). The Czech online application, which features interactive tools, allows students to use a historical laboratory to analyze period documents, historical photographs, or audio recordings in a step-by-step process. Czech teachers have effectively used this tool in their teaching, encouraging students' creativity and historical reasoning. The project undergoes systematic evaluation.

INCORPORATING PHOTOGRAPHY INTO THE EDUCATION MODEL

The above digital databases serve as inspiration and foundational resources for primary and secondary education. They can be used to enhance student's critical analysis skills of source documents from different eras, or to support active teaching methods and foster school community engagement. Their appeal and ease of use stem from student's daily practices involving visual culture. Additionally, visual materials can form the basis of education not only in humanities, especially history but also in interdisciplinary projects involving exact sciences. Using photography in historical education offers a broad range of possibilities, including:

- documenting events, changes, and processes of social transformation in the political, social, and economic context;
- visual analysis to uncover the author's intentions and historical context;

- developing critical thinking skills to analyze credibility, the author's perspective, potential for distorting reality, and impact on the audience;
- explaining historical processes – the origin and consequences of historical events;
- education about culture and identity, including understanding the culture, customs, trends of the era, clothing, and character expression;
- differentiating forms from archival resources to art photography, which deepens multifaceted historical understanding;
- developing soft skills, including empathy, for analyzing different cultures or everyday practices.

The analysis of visual material can show diverse perspectives of historical events (victim and perpetrator in the archives of Ośrodek Karta or Teatr NN), including preparation of photo galleries from various historical periods or locations, professional environments, and showing the variability over time (archives of NCK, NINATEKA, and others), complexities of political history in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g., OSA and others), or marginalized groups that no longer exist in the local space (the aforementioned projects in Brześć or Lublin). Digital archives also serve for in-depth analysis of the historical development of propaganda, which is crucial for the contemporary understanding of the phenomenon of disinformation war by the younger generations, and thus strengthens the so-called social immunity.

Adam Piwek, analyzing the English practice of historical education, draws attention to the fact that the use of photographs has become popular with the topic of the Holocaust and the situation of the Jewish community in the Third Reich. The selection of visual material and composition allows the student to gain a deeper understanding of historical phenomena, and photography, therefore, constitutes a separate message in English history textbooks. Piwek cites an example from a textbook describing the Holocaust by Ann Moore and Christopher Culpin. Four photographs were introduced as inspiration for students to reflect on the possibility of the German Jewish community's reaction to the events presented. The photographs depict various situations from the life of the Jewish community – their Jewish peer forced by a Nazi officer to cut his father's beard, burning books written by authors under the Star of David, the view of a small German town with a road on which hangs the sign "Jews are not welcome here", the walk of Jewish merchants, followed by policemen,

forcing them to carry banners with the inscription: "Do not buy from a Jew. Buy from German shopkeepers". The task of the students is to write down the consequences of individual ideas and confront them in a discussion with the teacher. This task requires knowledge in various subjects and interpersonal communication skills (Piwek, 2012: 69; Moore and Culpin, 2008: 21).

Photography can also become a process of strengthening students' creativity, by using this method for authorial, group, or individual projects to illustrate history, introduce biographical method, reconstruct events, or an architectural story about place of residence. Individual work with family or local community material leading to the development of activism in the form of social archivisms supported by the aforementioned institutions in Poland (Centre for Social Archivistics, Teatr NN in Lublin, Karta Centre, and others).

In Poland, we have inspiring projects whose formula can be applied in the classroom. The project entitled '**Teen Flying University**' [Latający Uniwersytet Młodzieży], initiated in the spirit of protecting local identity by Tomasz Cybulski and carried out by students, is part of social archiving. According to the creators, the action aims to raise awareness of local history and promote memorial sites. The project consists of two parts. The first is a theoretical series of lectures and direct as well as online workshops, in which the education of young people concerns the workshop of a historian, the history of the local community, knowledge of local memorial sites and social media work and safety as well as photo and video content creation. The second part of the project is field work on the maintenance and interpretation of local memorial sites (maintenance of cleanliness, new signage, on-site and online descriptions, interpretation of history, collection of testimonies to keep the memory alive for future generations) (*Teen Flying University*, 2025). Dr. hab. Małgorzata Makiewicz initiated the International Photographic Competition 'Mathematics in the Lens,' which combines content in the field of mathematics, nature and biology with the students' own involvement. Participation in the competition involves submitting 6 photographs that showcase the connections between reality and mathematics. According to its creators, the projects completed as part of the competition can be a starting point for discussions on topics that include the curriculum and teaching programs of various subjects, such as biology (Helie and Świtlik, 2021: 32-33). The school initiative is the 'Living Pictures – School Then and Now' photography project carried out by the Bachowice School and Kindergarten

Complex. In connection with the 25th anniversary of the school's banner and the naming of the school after Fr. Dr. Franciszek Gołba, the students recreated two archival photographs of teacher Irena Karamańska with students on the school stairs (a photograph from the 1950s). The first photograph depicts a scene from the 20th century, while the second one shows female students from an agricultural school at work (a photograph from the interwar period). The results of the work were presented in the form of a school exhibition ('Projekt Fotograficzny...', 2025). A primary School in Dziwnów named after the 5th Kołobrzeg Infantry Regiment initiated the 'Historical Sources in My Home – Educational Project' which used the method of photography to deepen historical knowledge, sense of identity and belonging to a social group and the so-called small homeland in the spirit of patriotic education. According to the creators, the project's goals included developing knowledge about historical sources, establishing relationships between students and family members, as well as the local community, shaping a respectful attitude towards both distant and near history, and fostering a sense of belonging to the family and local community, combined with the advantages of teamwork and the development of source selection skills (preparation for independent research on subjects that are historical sources or individuals who could be sources of history ('Źródła historyczne...', 2025). The projects are examples of additional activating offers in school practice and can become a model example for use at every stage of teaching.

IN PLACE OF A SUMMARY

As part of innovation in education, we can offer young people a new type of creative work, using the methodological proposals of visual sociology and the center for social archiving. Inspiring methodologies include photorelation, photovoice, or the more complex photoelicitation (Makal Fairclough, 2018: 113–114). For the latter, John Collier's research work, based on building a relationship with the research subject, was of significant importance for developing the so-called collaborative model. The first two can be successfully implemented in school projects. Photovoice gives initiative and empowerment to the researcher. The teacher hands the camera back to the subject (student) and en-

courages them to photograph their world. Photography is at the center of this method, sometimes used interchangeably with photostimulation. Here, the student has the right and awareness to select an image for the examined aspect of social life, and through their experience, they attempt to document selected aspects of reality. In the case of photo reports/documentation, which is the realization of a given topic, or even a script, a series of photographs, properly planned, should analyze a specific social phenomenon and have value for social or historical research. The teacher can prepare specific guidelines, a kind of “photographer’s guide” in the form of instructions from Roy Striker, the director of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) project, or Charles Suchar’s concept (1997: 34) when the creator is guided by a primary research question (Makal Fairclough, 2018: 115). It is also possible to recommend the method of encoding sets of photos, so that they are useful for supplementing visual studies in the future. Educational projects understood as the student’s creative work can be applied in various age groups with diverse technical knowledge, and skills. The material provides a starting point for education about social processes, but also for self-evaluation and examination of the teacher’s own educational practice.

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