

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS OF THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM IN GDANSK

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In early 2022, I assumed that structuring a paper on museums' social responsibility would be an easy job. The events of 24 February 2022 changed my perception of the issue. What actually affected me most in this respect was getting to know the youngest of our Ukrainian residents, whom on 10 March I put up together with her five-people family at the Maritime Culture Centre (OKM), branch of the National Maritime Museum in Gdansk (NMM). More than 2.5 million refugees crossed the Polish border over the 40 days of the war. A wide-reaching help provided to the refugees, families, but also to cultural institutions, the staff of Ukrainian museums in finding accommodation, providing them with food, clothes, is a totally new dimension of social responsibility which we had not practiced before on such a scale. Among the actions conducted by museums we can name collecting and transporting materials to preserve historic heritage or the assistance provided to partner museums in Ukraine.¹ Furthermore, meetings with museum curators from Ukraine were often organized, such as the lecture of Ludmila Rybchenko from the Great Patriotic War Museum in Kyiv who spoke at NMM.

Museums' social responsibility does not cover a new area of activities locating museums among institutions contributing to creating a better social reality.² Already for a long time many of museum operations addressed to different

age groups have been underpinned with the responsibility value. The paradigm in question, by now well rooted in Europe, overcomes a stereotypical perception of cultural institutions as those caring only for tangible and intangible testimonies to the past of mankind, at the same time imposing on them responsibility versus society and community.³ This thesis resounded already in the concept of the New Museology, addressing the participation of the community in shaping museums' policies and consolidating their identity by strengthening cooperation with the local community.⁴

NMM in Gdansk wants to meet these challenges implementing not only educational and conservatory projects. We emphasize the commitment to important social issues, such as eradicating accessibility barriers to historic facilities, a broad participation of social organizations in the life of our institution, care for the environment, and sustainable development. However, in the present paper I am voicing an opinion in the extensive topic defined as 'accessibility' in museums only within the range of selected actions of educational character.⁵

One of the first actions which our institution undertook two decades ago was addressing the issue of the lack of space assigned to broadly-perceived education implemented through play and experience based on games and interactive stands. An opportunity to take a closer look at this question came with the

project meant to develop the former buildings of the municipal heating plant in Gdansk; these, after having been demolished, were supplanted with a new modern edifice called, not by accident, the Maritime Culture Centre (OKM). This development of a crucial character implemented in 2009–2012 was financed with the resources from the European Economic Area. The own contribution was provided by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (MKiDN). Following Poland's accession into the EU, museums, including our institution, often joined 'soft' international projects which clearly demonstrated that in the first decade of the 21st century museums would put an increasingly stronger emphasis on educational issues. Drawing inspiration from certain West European countries, one of the floors of our Centre was assigned the function of a large interactive hall where children and teenagers can both play and learn using various stands, games, and simulators. This unique display called 'People; Boats; Ports' is a permanent exhibition open on a single occasion to a limited number of individuals following a prior booking.⁶

The Museum of Fishing in Hel, NMM's branch, was opened after a comprehensive revitalization in 2016. The permanent exhibition there is complemented with interactive stands. They were financed as part of the government's 'Development of Culture Infrastructure Programme'. The goal of the Project was to increase accessibility and enhance attractiveness of the Hel Museum offer by extending display infrastructure addressed mainly to families with children. The implementation of the slogan 'learning through play' in the form of interactive stands allows to become

acquainted with the arcana of the profession characteristic of the region, namely sea fishing. The permanent exhibition with interactive stands titled *History of Fishing in the Gdansk Bay* is targeted at all those interested in nature, history, and culture of the Kashubian Coast. Thanks to the *Fishermen in Action* Project the knowledge of fishing can be also gained through interactive stands.

Another major project was that called 'Beyond-the-Horizon Course' addressed to individuals with special needs. Implemented in 2016 within the 'Accessible Culture' Programme of MKiDN, it aimed mainly to facilitate access to the Museum resources to intellectually disabled and autistic students through specially organized educational classes in all the NMM branches. Thanks to these actions conditions were created for a cooperation among educators, school psychologists, and teachers taking care of students with disabilities, providing them with a platform for experience exchange and for broadening the knowledge of museum educators of methodology of work with students affected with mental disorders. The partner of the Project was No 17 Complex of Special Needs Schools in Gdynia. All the Schools' students participated in monthly classes held at subsequent branches of our institution; divided into groups of varied intellectual disability, they participated in such activities as learning about the work of a skin diver, inspecting the equipment of a skin diver and a scuba diver, becoming acquainted with the work of a seaman aboard 'Sołdek' and 'Dar Pomorza'. The classes for groups with mental disorders were introduced into the regular education offer of NMM.⁷



1. National flags of Poland and Ukraine as seen against the Gdansk Crane, an NMM branch



2. Photo of visitors attending the lecture of Ms Ludmila Rybchenko, PhD, at the Maritime Culture Centre in Gdansk. Ms Rybchenko fifth from the left. In the central part of the photo, eighth and ninth from the left, two other Ukrainian ladies who benefitted from the accommodation provided by NMM, and currently working at our institution

In 2019, when working out a new concept for NMM's operations, the managerial team and the curators decided to critically revise our institution's vision and mission. A complex look at the changing world, the public, the state of the environment allowed to identify many areas of activity which had not been taken into consideration before, or had not been so obvious in the daily work of a museologist.

Customarily, vision and mission of a museum contain phrases defining taking care of the amassed collections, care for their conservation and display to the public. It is generally hard to find in such programme documents reflection on the institution's impact on society, ecosystem in which we live and work, or on sustainable development. Changes occurring in the environment, availability of the offer for excluded groups, migrants, elderly people, care for an appropriate education level, or shaping civic attitudes are elements which inevitably should appear on the agendas of many cultural institutions. The final 'outcome' of the vision worked out by NMM formulates the message that we want to create an open museum, combining tradition and modernity, inspiring and telling stories about sea-based heritage. Our mission is then amassing and preserving cultural and technical maritime heritage, and disseminating maritime knowledge by implementing museum activities including, e.g., collecting exhibits, study, education, and preparing permanent and temporary exhibitions. We intend to implement our mission in harmony with the philosophy of social responsibility, sustainable development, responsible

consumption, and care for reasonable management of our planet's natural resources. We would also like our institution to be a place of encounter and a platform for dialogue, permanent education, critical thinking, and shaping social attitudes.⁸

'Responsibility' is a word of a very broad meaning. Looking at the infrastructure of museums in our country we can see that accessibility to many is strongly restricted. NMM in Gdansk has a daily experience with this challenge, since we manage unique museum exhibits: the historic 'Dar Pomorza' sailing ship and the historic 'Sołdek' coal-and-ore freighter. Both were built to sail on seas: one to train seamen under sail, the other to transport heavy freights; neither was designed to serve as a museum. Just the very getting on board is challenging to many individuals. In principle, a ship and its interior are an area which constitutes one huge barrier. How to overcome it and enable safe visiting? The answer is not simple. The heritage ship as an object protected by the law cannot be freely modified and adapted. Therefore, we looked for other methods of making it accessible. Following the renovation of the 'Sołdek' Ship Museum in 2020, two years were spent on the new permanent exhibition inside the freighter. Owing to the physical barrier constituted by narrow and steep stairs to the cargo hold, museum curators decided to provide an alternative for individuals with physical impairment. In the lobby of the Museum's main building on Ołowianka Island where the freighter is moored a special multimedia post allowing

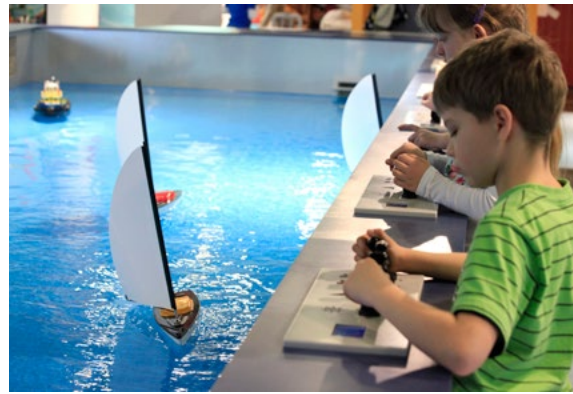
to see a VR visualization of the ship has been designed and mounted. 3D scans allow to see the ship's peculiar structure, peep into the inaccessible spaces, and get to know the ship's history.

A more innovative solution also addressed to individuals with impaired mobility has been currently introduced aboard 'Dar Pomorza'. Since 11 May 2021 NMM has been inviting the public to visit the 'Dar Pomorza' Ship Museum in an entirely new dimension. In cooperation with the VR For Business Company we have prepared the first in Poland innovative Interactive Spherical Video (ISV) for a cultural institution. Not facing any architectural barriers, using the Oculus Quest 2 goggles, the public visit the spaces whose equipment and functions are the most interesting: the aft deck and commander's lounge are shown from an entirely new perspective; commander's sea cabin, the chart room, the officers' mess, the engine room, and a little hospital not available for visiting by regular public. The unique quality of this product consists in the continuous and interactive filming process, which is exceptional world-wide, since the majority of such productions are based on static 360° photos. The realism of the experience is enhanced by a professional reader, on-deck animations, or officers being watched when fulfilling their daily duties.

Modern 3D goggles for the Spherical Video are available at a specially prepared post aboard the ship, accessible to visitors with mobility impairment. The option with Polish captions is available for deaf individuals, while the recorded reader is accompanied by a translator of the Polish sign language. The selection of legible icons, visible colours and fonts stemmed from the care for the comfort of visitors with a poor eyesight (senior citizens, with impaired sight, or with vision defect). The device is equipped with a distancing insert allowing the goggles to be used by individuals wearing corrective glasses whose dimensions do not exceed 142 x 50 mm, and a minijack socket permitting to connect one's own headphones. The Interactive Spherical Video can also activate an English menu and captions.

Struggling for the largest possible accessibility, particularly in the course of the pandemic, together with the work on the video for the 3D goggles, a version was prepared of Internet browsers. This offers the choice between two video qualities: low and high, so that the playing of the video is also possible on older hardware and at a lower Internet connection bandwidth. The videos are available at www.dar-pomorza360.nmm.pl. This undertaking is a part of a larger comprehensive project whose goal is to facilitate visiting the historic freighter to individuals with different disfunctions, also intellectual and physical.⁹

It seems natural that modern institutions, not only cultural, look towards management methods focused on taking care of the environment. When a new museum is planned today, factors such as a potential transport accessibility or availability of parking spaces in the nearest vicinity are taken into consideration. In view of the drastically increasing parking prices in the city centre, availability of public transport is worth 'its weight in gold'. Furthermore, when new buildings are planned new potential sources of power supply are taken into consideration. Heat pumps, solar panels, or thermal insulation systems limiting power consumption are common. Some of these solutions were applied in the Shipwreck



3. Interactive exhibition for children and teenagers at the Maritime Culture Centre in Gdansk



4. Interactive Spherical Video watched through the Oculus goggles on 'Dar Pomorza' in Gdynia

Centre for Conservation in Tczew, NMM's branch. This modern ascetic-mass building contains unique study large-size objects, including wrecks of boats and ships extracted during the archaeological underwater research. Additionally, there is a vast space inside in which conservation of various historic items is conducted. The building houses an advanced X-ray lab and devices to scan heritage pieces.

The majority of museums want to be perceived as modern environment-friendly companies. This is particularly visible in large cities.¹⁰ Do we really try hard enough to improve the environment, transforming it so that our children can enjoy the biodiversity of the planet? When implementing various educational programmes our Museum clearly signals the need to draw attention to the environment pollution, particularly of the Baltic. Among the classes offered in 2020 we had, for instance, school-break activities for families titled 'Unbearable Litter in the Oceans'. Another series which enjoyed popularity was 'Micro and Macro, namely... we're cleaning water': videos showing experiments removing 'pollution' from the water surface. The experiments concerned the pollution of water with microplastic and oil. The artistic competition *CHILDREN'S GIFT Ship* was to create the image of a ship not only with artistic materials, but also using recycled ones. Another series of educational packages



5. 'Plastic Sea' Exhibition presented in the cargo hold of the 'Soldek' Ship Museum



6. 'Girls Rolling on Waves', a series of meetings with women dealing with the sea in their career, its investigation or conquest; traditionally held on 8 March at MNN

(online classes, currently prepared in a new format) *Sea, Our Sea* spoke of the sea pollution and taught how to prevent it, extending the participants' knowledge of natural heritage.¹¹

Social responsibility is not only ecology, but also drawing attention to the equality of gender, culture, or skin colour of our visitors. The series of seminars 'Girls Rolling on Waves', held for several years on 8 March, allows to get to know extraordinary women whose work or passion is connected with water in general terms. The leitmotif of the series is to present individuals who make their dreams come true, often despite difficulties caused by everyday life. Up to now the list of the seminar protagonists has contained famous yachswomen, researchers into sea fauna and flora, women working on ships, or those diving professionally. Initially, the series was addressed first of all to secondary-school students, however, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and on-line presentation it has reached a broader audience. During one of the panels, coinciding with the 60th jubilee of NMM, we asked a group of ladies from various departments of the Museum to speak about their work, its specificity, and challenges that await women in museology.¹²

Online education, particularly during the pandemic constituted quite a challenge, since the selection of curricula and class subjects was at the beginning an experiment. NMM tried to attract young viewers online, offering educational packages, interviews with famous individuals and with heritage pieces, online guided exhibition tours, finally also accounts of preview nights. Neither did we refrain from competitions, workshops, and briefing videos. Furthermore, our Museum, takes part in the series of meetings titled Creative Pedagogy based on a regular cooperation among in-service training groups of teachers. Inter-school teams provide mutual support in everyday work, they improve their skills, or discuss their practices. There are two categories of such groups: subject-related: for those interested in modern teaching methods, and thematic: for those who desire to deepen their psychological and pedagogical knowledge. As part of the cooperation with representatives of Creative Pedagogy we have prepared classes adjusted to the programme's needs.

When creating their new offers, museums tend to more and more frequently focus on the needs of senior citizens. Poland's demographic structure clearly demonstrates that with the course of time they will form an extremely numerous group, requiring social care. Classes for senior citizens at NMM are held twice a month, and last for three hours. They include, among others, artistic workshops combined with visiting NMM's exhibitions. Under the guidance of an artist and museum educators, the participants become acquainted with various art techniques (painting, drawing, water-colour, charcoal, painting on glass, gouache), and create works inspired by NMM's exhibitions, the sea, and the Gdansk region. Our Museum participates in the 'Culture 60+' Programme run by MKiDN.¹³

Other NMM's activities, though of a similar character, since 2002 have been connected with the 'Differently Abled' Foundation. As a result, cyclical displays of workshop participants' works have been mounted. Our cooperation with the Foundation was launched on 8 December 2002. On that day the Museum purchased for its collection the ceramic sculpture *Noah's Ark* by Tadeusz Sterna, Foundation's charge,



7. Plein-air painting workshop for senior citizens with the Gdansk Crane in the background

thus engaging itself in overcoming social barriers people with disabilities face. This was the beginning of our joint effort to overcome mental barriers towards people with disabilities through cyclical exhibitions presenting the creative output from the artistic and ceramic workshops held as part of Foundation's occupational therapy. The first exhibition titled *Not Only the Sea* was launched at the Granaries on Ołowianka Island in 2004.

Worth pointing to is the exhibition launched at OKM in 2015 titled *Fairy Tales of a Salty Wind*. It was already the ninth display of the works by people with disabilities at our Museum. It presented the retrospective of ceramic works from the Foundation's activity and artistic works created as part of the *Four Seasons (Harbours)* workshop programme (held at NMM).

In December 2019, a jubilee exhibition of the works of the charges of the Foundation celebrating its 30 years was mounted. The display was accompanied by the seminar 'People with Disabilities are among Us', which summed up the 15 years of our cooperation with the 'Differently Abled' Foundation, presenting its achievements. To-date, 11 editions of mariner exhibitions have been held. The works were presented both at the Museum's main seat, and at NMM's branches in Gdansk (OKM), Hel, and Tczew.

Working with children and teenagers on a daily basis we insist on having a skilled support provided by individuals



8. 'Two Worlds' Exhibition celebrating 30 years of the 'Differently Able' Foundation



9. Youth Museum Council session with Education Department staff

All photos come from the Archives of the National Maritime Museum in Gdańsk.

younger than the Museum staff. With this purpose in mind, a Youth Museum Council was established at NMM in February 2020; it is composed of students of two Gdansk secondary schools: No. 1 Nicolaus Copernicus Grammar School and PaWEł Adamowicz University Grammar School. In regular meetings, youngsters participating in our Museum's projects consolidate our self-confidence thanks to other than 'museological' perspective on the questions of display, education, and of interactions with various social groups.

We owe many of the activities implemented by NMM to a number of individuals associated in the Society of NMM's Friends, supporting the Museum up to this day. The organization aims at assisting our institution's development, helps to provide financing to purchase precious exhibits; it also animates many cultural and artistic events connected with the maritime cultural heritage broadly speaking. Furthermore,

our institution would not have advanced so far in this journey had it not been for the support of two other organizations, namely the Society of the Friends of 'Sołdek' Ship Museum¹⁴ and the Society of the Friends of 'Dar Pomorza' Ship Museum.

The above examples of social engagement of NMM in Gdansk are but a fraction of actions which can be listed in such a short paper. The recent years have demonstrated that while staying faithful to the basic tasks for which museums were established, they can choose from varied forms of social activity opening up great opportunities for our institutions. The development of these competences will certainly outline the directions of future 'engaged' museology which also aims to eliminate social exclusion, improve accessibility to culture by individuals with special needs, and to cooperate with the widest possible range of the public.

Abstract: Social responsibility in museums is not an entirely new domain. For many years now activities locating museums among the institutions contributing to creating better social reality have been observed. This new paradigm overcomes the stereotypical perception of cultural institutions as organizations taking care only of tangible and intangible testimony to the past of mankind, at the same time imposing on them the responsibility versus society and the community.

The National Maritime Museum (NMM) in Gdansk tries to face these challenges not only by implementing educational and conservation projects, but also by supporting the development of the very Museum and its branches, at the same time directing its activities towards engaging in important social issues, such as eradicating accessibility barriers to heritage facilities, care for the environment, and sustainable development.

Among the most recent accomplishments described in the paper let us mention the projects implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the new visiting format presented on the 'Dar Pomorza' Museum Ship. On 11 May 2021, NMM shared with the public the so-called Interactive Spherical Video integrated with modern Oculus goggles, introducing the spectator into interactive augmented reality allowing to become acquainted with the sailing ship from a new perspective, accessible to visitors with impaired mobility. A similar solution, though amidst a different landscape, was proposed in the lobby of the Museum's main building on Ołowińska Island in Gdansk. Without getting aboard the 'Sołdek' Museum Ship, we can peep into its cargo hold and engine room. Furthermore, the paper describes many interesting educational or advertising undertakings which attempt at facing contemporary social challenges.

Keywords: accessibility, museology, ships, education, barriers.

Endnotes

- ¹ H. Borkowska, 'Muzeum w Berdyczowie', *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, 2 (227) (II 2022), p. 3, https://nmm.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NMMbiuletyn_02.22.pdf [Accessed: 1 June 2022]. This is the topic that I tackled in the meeting of directors of cultural institutions run and co-run by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage in Warka on 9 May 2022 with the paper titled *Museums without Borders*.
- ² On the topic see Ł. Gawel, 'Zarządzanie publicznymi instytucjami kultury w kontekście koncepcji Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Społeczna odpowiedzialność muzeum', *Studia Ekonomiczne. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach*, 376 (2018), pp. 48-62. There, also literature on the subject.
- ³ On the change occurring in museums see *Museums and the Challenge of Change. Old Institutions in a New World*, ed. by G. Black, London 2021. The National Institute for Museums and Public Collection has studied the social impact of museums. See P.T. Kwiatkowski, B. Nessel-Lukasik, *Muzeum w społeczności lokalnej. Raport*, Warszawa 2018, <https://www.nimoz.pl/files/articles/212/Raport%20Publiczno%C5%9B%C4%87%20muze%C3%B3w%20w%20Polsce%202018.pdf> [Accessed: 2 July 2022].
- ⁴ A. Tołysz, 'Muzeum w procesie. Wybrane tendencje w muzealnictwie w XX wieku', *Muzealnictwo*, 61 (2020), pp. 40ff; on the topic of museums and educational activities in shaping the social fabric see also M. Walewski, A. Wudarczyk, 'Rola nowoczesnych muzeów narracyjnych w rozwoju miast', in: *Muzeum i zmiana. Losy muzeów narracyjnych*, ed. by P. Kowal, K. Wolska-Pabian, Warszawa-Kraków 2019 (*Muzeologia*, 16), pp. 287-289.
- ⁵ The discussion of other projects, e.g., those connected with collection digitizing, architectural adjustment of NMM's historic edifices exceeds the volume of this paper. NIMOZ deals extensively with museum's 'accessibility', implementing, among others, 'Barrier-free Museums: Accessibility Plus', <https://www.nimoz.pl/baza-wiedzy/muzea-bez-barrier-dostepnosc-plus/rekomendacje-dla-muzeow-dotyczace-programu-dostepnosc-plus.html> [Accessed: 2 July 2022].
- ⁶ *Narodowe Muzeum Morskie w Gdańsku 2010-2020*, ed. by R. Domżał, Gdańsk 2020, pp. 67-71.
- ⁷ *50 lat Centralnego Muzeum Morskiego w Gdańsku 1960-2010*, ed. by J. Litwin, Gdańsk 2011, p. 61 and ff. We also wrote about it in NMM's newsletter under the Education section. See *Wiadomości. Biuletyn Informacyjny Narodowego Muzeum Morskiego w Gdańsku*, 12 (165) (XII 2016), https://nmm.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/NMMBiuletyn12_2016.pdf [Accessed: 2 June 2022]; *Wiadomości. Biuletyn Informacyjny Narodowego Muzeum Morskiego w Gdańsku*, 3 (156) (III 2016), https://nmm.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/NMMBiuletyn003_2016.pdf [Accessed: 2 June 2022].

- ⁸ R. Domżał, 'Wizja i Misja', in: *Sprawozdanie Roczne Narodowego Muzeum Morskiego w Gdańsku 2019*, ed. by R. Domżał, Gdańsk 2020, p. 5.
- ⁹ 'Odpowiedzialność społeczne w działaniach NMM', in: *Sprawozdanie Roczne Narodowego Muzeum Morskiego w Gdańsku 2021*, ed. by R. Domżał, M. Westphal, Gdańsk 2022, pp. 10, 46.
- ¹⁰ On social projects within cities see M. Walewski, A. Wudarczyk, op. cit., pp. 281-287.
- ¹¹ *Sprawozdanie Roczne Narodowego Muzeum Morskiego w Gdańsku 2019...*, p. 21. The threat to cultural heritage and climate change were the topics discussed at an international conference in Oslo in 2021. See *Oslo Forum 2021. Cultural Heritage in a Changing Climate*, Oslo 2022, https://baltic-heritage.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Cultural-Heritage-in-a-Changing-Climate-two-page-spread-1_compressed-1-1.pdf [Accessed: 2 June 2022].
- ¹² K. Schaefer-Rychel, '4. Edycja konferencji „Dziewczyny na fali”', *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, 3 (238) (2022), pp. 10-13, https://nmm.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NMMbiuletyn_03.22.pdf [Accessed: 1 June 2022].
- ¹³ On those projects see *Wiadomości. Biuletyn Informacyjny Narodowego Muzeum Morskiego w Gdańsku*, 9-10 (162-163) (IX-X 2016), pp. 3, 4, https://nmm.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/NMMbiuletyn09-10_2016.pdf [Accessed: 2 June 2022].
- ¹⁴ „Soldek” – klejnot wśród muzealnych statków handlowych, Gdańsk 2012 (*Studia i Materiały Centralnego Muzeum Morskiego w Gdańsku*, vol. 13); J. Litwin, 'Rys historyczny 1960-1991', in *50 lat Centralnego Muzeum Morskiego w Gdańsku...*, pp. 24-26 ff; I. Sienicki, *Dzieje statku – muzeum „Soldek”*, Gdańsk 1988, pp. 30, 31 and ff; *25 lat statku-muzeum „Soldek”*, Gdańsk 2008 (*Studia i Materiały Centralnego Muzeum Morskiego w Gdańsku*, vol. 8).

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