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Report: *Broadcasting freedom – how the information circuit between Radio Free Europe and the Polish samizdat is related*

from the research project referring to the fond of Radio Free Europe
at the Vera & Donald Blinken Open Society Archives
conducted from 28th March to 27th May in Budapest.

Introduction

This research was an attempt to recognize the information circuit between Radio Free Europe (later REF) and the Polish samizdat movement from the 1970s to the 1990s, and ultimately, to analyze and reconstruct it.

The research began with the description of Radio Free Europe and the samizdat movement and its periodicals which were preserved by Radio Free Europe. Later, attention was moved to the administrative documents covering information about broadcasted programmes and samizdat collection. A spreadsheet with a list of the cited periodicals for the programme about Polish samizdat and a list with periodicals collected by the radio were started.

Research questions and first answers to them coming from the analysis and synthesis

The research questions can be divided into two main groups. One concerning the use of samizdat by Radio Free Europe and the second one about finding aids provided to the researches by OSA.

Research questions on use of Polish samizdat:

1. How can the information circuit be traced?
2. To what extent can the information circuit be traced?
3. What can be traced? Is it possible to trace which samizdat publications were used for which broadcasted programmes and vice versa?
4. Were there any references created by the radio or samizdat publishers?
5. What kind of references are there to trace the information circuit?
6. For what subjects did Radio Free Europe use information published in the Polish samizdat publications?

Research question referring to the finding aids:

How does the available archival description support that kind of research?

First findings:

Reading administrative records, researching how the collection of samizdat was growing from the 70ies through the establishing a separated unit in the 80ies just to manage it until the 90ies and browsing through the subject files or index of periodicals preserved in the subfond 300-50¹ and 300-55² it is possible to get some ideas about the circuit of information coming from The Polish underground press. It not well researched how the periodicals got to the radio because there are no sources. One cannot find any information about it unless asking the people like Witold Pronobis (head of Underground Publications Unit at RFE) engaged in organizing the “smuggling” process.

Theoretically, it could be possible to trace which periodicals and articles were cited in particular broadcasted programmes as one document found in one of the boxes shows. But there is lack of documentation for all programmes with references to what was really the information source. For the research period time 1970-1990 only one list exists with used periodicals and topics presented in the programme about Polish samizdat in the years: 1982-1988 is preserved³. From the analysis list we can learn which periodicals were mostly

¹ <http://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/iDen75oK>

² <http://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/iDen7aGn>

³ Underground Press Sources for Polish BD Broadcast Department Programs: HU OSA 300-55-1 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Polish Underground Publications Unit: Administrative Files Archival boxes #2 / No. 11, <http://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/lijM2jp03>.

Example: <http://www.parallelarchive.org/document/4689>

used for that one particular programme. Records for other broadcasts are missing in Budapest and there is no sign if any are available somewhere else. They could be destroyed after the radio was decommissioned in 1994 and records were prepared to be transferred to the archives or even before as such practices of destroying non important and unused materials were common especially because of the space in the warehouses taken by them as mentioned in the book "Głosy z Monachium" by Jerzy Morawski. That kind of information of sources cannot be provided from other preserved materials. The research on program transcriptions kept by OSA from the 50ies and the National Digital Archives in Warsaw (online accessed records from the 70ies)⁴ showed that even the programmes' transcriptions do not cover the references on information sources. They contain information about the content of the broadcasts. Hardly ever is it possible to find out what the source was.

The Radio used samizdat to all kind of subjects but generally describing current situation in the country. To get the wide perspective of a variety of topics please have a look into one of the Subject files lists created by the radio⁵.

Beyond the above mentioned tools Radio had other to organize its collection of samizdat like: index of underground periodicals.

Further research comparison with other records from the fond of RFE spread worldwide is necessary to continue and finish the research started at OSA as well as other databases on samizdat in Poland to find out the most exact percentage of samizdat it was collected by the radio. For now one can estimate that about 25% of titles published by the opposition got to Munich.

Provided by the Open Society Archives, catalogues let the researcher easily find what is preserved in the warehouses of the house. The description is done at the box level content. Also context description at the fond level is very helpful. Some problems occurred after metadata migration from the old catalogue because some records are not presented in the catalogue and even one archival unit was found by chance by the OSA staff, which is not available in the current catalogue nor in the old one. What is missing are links to digitized materials presented in other systems OSA has and there are some digitized records that are not stored in Budapest. One may also wonder if the records division of Polish Desk (previous name of the Polish Unit at the radio) into Polish Periodical Unit and Polish Unit and then by

⁴ <http://szukajwarchiwach.pl/3/36/0/str/30/100?ps=True#tabZespol>

⁵ <http://www.parallelarchive.org/document/4688>

thematic series is efficient. Maybe it could be organized differently, but probably the amount of records does not allow it and the REF fond is spread worldwide: Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland and the USA.

Checked sources:

Fond: Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute:

- Subfond: Polish Underground Publications Unit (HU OSA 300-55):
 - HU OSA 300-55-1 Administrative Files, 1953-1994
 - HU OSA 300-55-2 Index to Polish Underground Periodicals, 1976-1990
 - HU OSA 300-55-3 Index to Polish Underground Monographs, 1976-1989
 - HU OSA 300-55-4 Polish Underground Periodicals, 1976-1990
 - HU OSA 300-55-5 Polish Underground Monographs
 - HU OSA 300-55-6 Polish Independent Publications (IDC Microfiche), 1976-1988
 - HU OSA 300-55-7 Printed Ephemera, 1981-1989
 - HU OSA 300-55-9 RFE Publications Based on Polish Underground Press, 1977-1990
- Subfond: Polish Unit (HU OSA 300-50):
 - HU OSA 300-50-1 Old Code Subject Files, 1951-1993
 - HU OSA 300-50-2 New Code Subject Files, 1953-1991
 - HU OSA 300-50-3 Subject Card Files, 1952-1992
 - HU OSA 300-50-5 Miscellaneous Subject Files, 1953-1965
 - HU OSA 300-50-19 Polish Press Monitoring
 - HU OSA 300-50-20 OMRI Press Summary
 - HU OSA 300-50-22 Program Transcripts and Related Background Materials, 1956-1957
 - HU OSA 300-50-27 Polish Press Survey in English
 - HU OSA 300-50-50 Additions to Subject Files (does not exist any more, but was mentioned in the old catalogue).
- Interviewed persons: Witold Pronobis

Research methods

The research covered activities, such as archives and library research, critical analysis and assessment, competition and synthesis of information from the records and two new methods were adopted at place: visualizations and interviews.

Outcome

The results of the research are answers to the research questions put in a form of a paper, which should be finalized in the near future. Additionally, a spreadsheet was made with statistic analysis and some experimental visualization with Tableau Public, which are available online⁶. A part of this paper about the samizdat collection especially from 1988-1991 probably extended with information about digitalized collection of periodicals in cooperation with Pokolenie will be delivered to the Breakthrough Archives⁷, an archival project initiative powered by the former President of Poland Bronisław Komorowski, to bring the collection of the breaking point which is the system change in the modern history of Poland out of the dark to a mainstream audience.

⁶ <https://public.tableau.com/profile/publish/MartiallawGraphs/Story#!/> (visualization presents a part of the data from the spreadsheet).

⁷ *Archiwa Przełomu* <http://www.archiwaprzelomu.pl/>