

# Cultural heritage of the Argentine Polish community in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Buenos Aires

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## *Cultural heritage of the Argentine Polish community in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Buenos Aires*

The Polish Army Museum in Martín Coronado, a town in Buenos Aires province, is the only museum in South America dedicated to promoting Polish historical and cultural heritage. The museum houses a collection of unique memorabilia that serve to preserve the memory of Polish soldiers and make a valuable contribution to the preservation and dissemination of Polish cultural heritage. The Polish historical and cultural heritage in Argentina is extremely rich and has a long tradition dating back to the nineteenth century, when the first Poles began to settle on Argentinian lands. By advocating for Polish cultural heritage beyond the borders of Poland, the museum not only helps prevent it from being forgotten but also enriches the world's cultural heritage.

This article analyses the activities of the Polish Army Museum in Buenos Aires by presenting the origins of its establishment; the characteristics and organisation of its collection; the methods used for storage, cataloguing and exhibiting; and the results of the inventory of 1,502 exhibits (as of January 2025). Additionally, the article aims to highlight the role of the museum as an institution responsible for the protection, documentation, and promotion of Polish historical and cultural heritage in Argentina as well as its significance in shaping historical memory.

Keyword: cultural heritage, Argentine Polish community, history of Poland, Polish Army Museum, Buenos Aires

## Introduction

Museums play a key role in promoting and preserving historical and cultural heritage. They are places where valuable artefacts, documents, works of art and other objects that bear witness

to the past, traditions and national identity are stored.<sup>1</sup> Their significance in heritage promotion is manifold and encompasses several crucial aspects.

According to the latest definition by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), a museum is a non-profit, permanent, open-to-the-public institution that acquires, maintains, studies, communicates and presents the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity for educational, research and recreational purposes.

Museums have an educational function, offering visitors an opportunity to learn about the history and culture of various societies, nations and regions.<sup>2</sup> Through appropriately designed exhibitions, audio guides and educational materials, visitors can learn details about the traditions, customs, art or history of particular periods.<sup>3</sup> For instance, exhibitions on history can show the rich political, social and cultural context of a country at different stages of its existence.

Museums are also responsible for storing and preserving valuable collections.<sup>4</sup> Artefacts, such as coins, documents, manuscripts, clothing, tools or paintings which may be damaged by the passage of time are properly preserved so that future generations will have the opportunity to learn about them. In this way, museums act as guardians of culture and history, ensuring permanence of knowledge about the past. Through careful cataloguing, documentation and maintenance of their collections, museums build bridges between the past and the present, giving contemporary audiences and future generations access to tangible evidence of historical events, social practices, artistic achievements and cultural traditions.

A museum exhibition should engage not only vision but also other senses, such as hearing (using sounds appropriate to the nature of the exhibition),<sup>5</sup> smell and even touch, allowing interaction with the exhibits.<sup>6</sup> The use of a harmonious combination of diverse stimuli heightens visitors' impressions and emotions, creating a unique atmosphere that distinguishes the exhibition.<sup>7</sup> Engaging multiple senses not only enriches the experience for visitors, it also promotes better retention of information and a deeper understanding of the presented content. By incorporating interactive elements, such as tactile replicas, period sounds or smells associated with a particular historical environment, audiences are able to immerse themselves in the story being told. This educational approach makes the exhibition more attractive, appeals to a diverse range of age groups and allows people with various learning styles to participate. It also supports the building of an emotional connection with the presented cultural heritage.

Museum facilities are spaces where national and cultural identity is promoted, both

<sup>1</sup> MERRIMAN, Nick. Museum collections and sustainability. In: *Cultural Trends*, 17(1), 2008, pp. 3–21. DOI: 10.1080/09548960801920278. ISSN: 0954-8963.

<sup>2</sup> ALIVIZATOU, Maria. Museums and Intangible Heritage. The Dynamics of an 'Unconventional' Relationship. In: *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*, 17, 2006, pp. 47–57. ISSN: 2041-9015.

<sup>3</sup> WYSZOWSKA, Iwona; JEŃDRYSIAK, Tomasz. *Turystyka muzealna*. Warszawa: Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne. 2017, ISBN 978-83-208-2765-2.

<sup>4</sup> ZALASIŃSKA, Katarzyna. *Muzea publiczne. Studium administracyjnoprawne*. Warszawa: Lexis Nexis Polska. 2013, ISBN 978-83-7620-760-0.

<sup>5</sup> KUO, Chen-Wo, LEE, Ya-Chu and WANG, Michelle, Chaotzu. The Digital Museum: A Case Study of Digital Applications in the National Palace Museum. In: *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: Arts and Humanities – Psychology*, 16(2), 2016, ISSN: 2249-460X.

<sup>6</sup> DAVIES, Susan. M., PATON, Rob. and O'SULLIVAN, Terry. J. The museum values framework: a framework for understanding organisational culture in museums. In: *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 28(4), 2013, pp. 345–361. ISSN 0964-7775.

<sup>7</sup> ZIÓLKOWSKA-WEISS, Kamila. Ewolucja tradycyjnych funkcji muzeum w narracyjne muzea multimedialne na przykładzie muzeum Fabryki Emalia Oskara Schindlera. In: *Przedsiębiorczość – Edukacja*, 9, 2013, pp. 162–174. ISSN 2080-8688.

locally and internationally.<sup>8</sup> One example from Poland is the Warsaw Rising Museum, which commemorates the events of 1944 while also building a sense of community and national pride by bringing the Poles' struggle for freedom closer.<sup>9</sup> Places of this kind strengthen social bonds and help shape a sense of belonging to a particular culture.

Museums also play a role in promoting intercultural dialogue by providing an insight into the cultures of various nations and traditions.<sup>10</sup> International exhibitions on, for example, the history of immigration or art from different corners of the world contribute to greater tolerance and understanding between nations.<sup>11</sup> As a result, museums can constitute a bridge between different cultures and help build a global community.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, these institutions engage visitors in active learning through workshops, lectures and educational meetings, promoting the development of empathy, openness and intercultural awareness among both younger and older audiences.<sup>13</sup>

The role and essence of culture and historical heritage in the museum have been addressed in the studies by many scholars.<sup>14</sup> Museums play a key role in shaping cultural and historical identity,<sup>15</sup> providing a space for reflection on the past and its significance for the present.<sup>16</sup> Through the selection and presentation of collections, they enable the study of social processes,<sup>17</sup> customs and traditions,<sup>18</sup> as well as support the development of critical thinking

<sup>8</sup> ZIĘBIŃSKA-WITTEK, Anna. Musealisation of communism, or how to create national identity in historical museums. In: *Muzeologia a kultúrne dedičstvo*, 8(4), 2020, pp. 59–72. ISSN 1339-2205.

<sup>9</sup> DUDA, Beata and FICEK, Ewa. Idee i wartości w dyskursie wspomnieniowym Powstańców Warszawskich (na materiale wywiadów z Archiwum Historii Mówionej Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego). *LingVaria*, 19(2[38]), 2024, pp. 79–90. <https://doi.org/10.12797/LV.19.2024.38.06>. ISSN: 2083-4740.

<sup>10</sup> ASHWORTH, Gregory. Planowanie dziedzictwa. In: BROŃSKI, Krzysztof et al. (eds.). In: *Miasto historyczne. Potencjał dziedzictwa*. Kraków: Wyd. Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 1997, pp. 25–48. ISBN: 83-85739-34-0.

<sup>11</sup> BOGUCKI, Mateusz. Rola działań odtwórczych i rekonstrukcyjnych w procesie upowszechniania wiedzy historycznej. In: ŁACH, Wiesław (ed.). *Polska myśl wojskowa na przestrzeni dziejów*. Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Littera, 2008, pp. 304–319. ISBN: 978-83-60088-02-0

<sup>12</sup> DU CROS, Hilary. Intangible Cultural Heritage, Education and Museums. Unpublished manuscript. 2012. Accessed April 8, 2025: [https://www.academia.edu/2236867/Intangible\\_Cultural\\_Heritage\\_Museums\\_and\\_Education\\_Focus\\_Issues\\_Paper\\_](https://www.academia.edu/2236867/Intangible_Cultural_Heritage_Museums_and_Education_Focus_Issues_Paper_)

<sup>13</sup> ROHRSCHEIDT, Armin von Mikos. Interpretacja dziedzictwa we współczesnej turystyce kulturowej. Cele i założenia, poziomy i wymiary programów, rodzaje podejmowanych działań. In: *Turystyka Kulturowa*, 6, 2019, pp. 61–102. ISSN: 2083-3036.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, HALL, C. Michael, ZEPPEL, Heather. Cultural and Heritage tourism: the new grand tour? In: *Historic Environment*, 7 (3/4), 1990, pp. 86–98. ISSN: 1352-0189; KŁOSKOWSKA, Antonina (1996). *Kultury narodowe u korzeni*. Warszawa: PWN. ISBN: 83-01-12496-9.

<sup>15</sup> MARCZAK, Mirosław. Rodzaje turystyki. In: SCHWICHTENBERG, Aleksander (ed.). *Podstany turystyki*. Koszalin: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Koszalińskiej, 2000, pp. 41–52. ISBN: 83-7247-008-9.

<sup>16</sup> ROHRSCHEIDT, Armin von Mikos. Konteksty i uwarunkowania zarządzania interpretacją dziedzictwa w turystyce kulturowej. In: *Turystyka kulturowa*, 3, 2020, pp. 41–102. ISSN: 2083-3036.

<sup>17</sup> DASZKIEWICZ, Wojciech. Podstawowe rozumienie kultury – ujęcie filozoficzne. In: *Roczniki kulturoznawcze*, 2010, pp. 43–64. ISSN: 2082-8578.

<sup>18</sup> GAWEŁ, Łukasz. W świetle Tildena. In: TILDEN, Freeman (ed.). *Interpretacja dziedzictwa* (polski przekład), Poznań: Centrum Turystyki Kulturowej Trakt, 2019, pp. 251–262. ISBN: 978-83-946436-7-6.

and intercultural awareness.<sup>19</sup> These institutions combine educational,<sup>20</sup> research<sup>21</sup> and social functions,<sup>22</sup> creating a bridge between generations and cultures.<sup>23</sup>

In the context of historical and cultural heritage, museums not only act as repositories of the past, they also serve as dynamic educational institutions that engage contemporary societies in reflecting on history, art and culture.<sup>24</sup> Through them, heritage is not just a record of past events, it is a living part of contemporary life.<sup>25</sup>

The definition of cultural heritage first appeared in the International Charter of Venice in 1964.<sup>26</sup> Initially, the only criteria for considering a site to belong to a place's cultural heritage were its historical and artistic values. Over time, however, other aspects, such as cultural value,<sup>27</sup> identity<sup>28</sup> and the ability of a given object to influence memory<sup>29</sup> began to be taken into account. Thanks to these components, cultural heritage is now also defined in terms of what contemporary generations want to pass on to future generations – be it through museums or in other ways, such as monuments and plaques commemorating important events or people of the past.<sup>30</sup>

Heritage is a metacultural process in which external events confer heritage status on an object. These objects always have clear cultural references, therefore cultural heritage can range from monumental buildings to intangible traditions, such as dance.<sup>31</sup> Studies of cultural and natural heritage constitute a rapidly growing field.<sup>32</sup> According to the Authorised Heritage Discourse,<sup>33</sup> heritage sites should have a rich history, high national significance and be highly

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<sup>19</sup> STYLIANOU-LAMBERT, Theopist, BOUKAS, Nikolaos and CHRISTODOULOU-YERALI, Marina. Museums and cultural sustainability: Stakeholders, forces, and cultural policies. In: *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 20, 2014, pp. 566–587. ISSN: 1028-6632.

<sup>20</sup> PEARCE, Susan. Studying museum material and collections. In: *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 1(1), 1994, pp. 30–39. ISSN: 1352-7258.

<sup>21</sup> STOLOW, Nathan. Conservation Policy and the Exhibition of Museum Collections. In: *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 16(2), 1997, pp. 12–20. ISSN: 0197-1360.

<sup>22</sup> PHILLIPS, Charles. The Ins and Outs of Deaccessioning: Despite years of discussion, deaccessioning remains a knotty problem for museums and historical agencies. In: *History News*, 38(11), 1983, pp. 6–11. ISSN: 0018-2745.

<sup>23</sup> KURIN, Richard. Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Key Factors in Implementing the 2003 Convention. In: *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 2, 2007, pp. 9–20. ISSN: 1976-6941.

<sup>24</sup> UZZELL, David. *Heritage Interpretation – Volume 2: The Visitor Experience*. London: Belhaven. 1989, ISBN-10: 1852930780.

<sup>25</sup> LADKIN, Nigel. (ed.). *Running a Museum: A Practical Handbook*. ICOM, 2004. Available at: [http://icom.museum/uploads/tx\\_hpoindexbdd/practical\\_handbook.pdf](http://icom.museum/uploads/tx_hpoindexbdd/practical_handbook.pdf). Accessed March 18, 2025. ISBN: 978-92-9012-357-3.

<sup>26</sup> VECCO, Marilena. A definition of cultural heritage: From the tangible to the intangible. In: *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 11(3), 2010, pp. 321–324. ISSN: 1296-2074.

<sup>27</sup> KOBYLINSKI, Zbigniew. Czym jest, komu jest potrzebne i do kogo należy dziedzictwo kulturowe? In: *Mazowsze – Studia Regionalne*, 7, 2011, pp. 21–77. ISSN: 1689-4774 (druk), 2543-4373.

<sup>28</sup> BARAŃSKA, Katarzyna. Muzeum i jego otoczenie a tożsamość lokalna. In: *Rocznik Muzeum Wsi Mazowieckiej w Sierpcu*, t. II, 2011, ISSN: 1897-3280.

<sup>29</sup> LATHAM, Kiersten F. Museum object as document. In: *Journal of Documentation*, 68(1), 2012, pp. 45–71. ISSN: 0022-0418.

<sup>30</sup> FAIRCLOUGH, Graham. New heritage frontiers. In: PALMER, Robert (ed.). *Heritage and Beyond*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2009, pp. 29–41. ISBN: 978-92-871-6815-4.

<sup>31</sup> SIECZKA, Dominika. *Potencjał rozwoju turystyki w Krakowie w oparciu o niematerialne dziedzictwo kulturowe, na przykładzie wydarzeń związanych z tańcem polonez*. 2022, Praca magisterska, Uniwersytet Jagielloński.

<sup>32</sup> BENDIX, Regina. Heritage between Economy and Politics. An Assessment from the Perspective of Cultural Anthropology. In: SMITH, Laurajane and AKAWA, Natsuko (eds.). *Intangible Heritage*. London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 253–269. ISBN: 978-0-415-45220-0.

<sup>33</sup> SMITH, Laurajane. *Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge, 2006. ISBN: 978-0-415-34798-4.

rated by experts. However, Smith criticises this approach, arguing that heritage is not just an object, place or event but a cultural process of remembrance and understanding.<sup>34</sup> An increasing number of researchers are approaching heritage not in terms of Authorised Heritage Discourse, but as a discourse, debate or process.<sup>35</sup>

## Polish cultural and historical heritage in Argentina

Poland has a strong historical and cultural heritage in Argentina dating back to the nineteenth century.<sup>36</sup> The first major waves of Polish immigrants arrived in the country in the early 1880s, primarily in search of better living conditions after the partition period. They mainly came from areas that now belong to Poland, such as Galicia.<sup>37</sup> In Argentina, Poles settled mainly in the provinces of Buenos Aires, Entre Ríos and Misiones.

Polish immigrants made a rich contribution to Argentinian culture, both in terms of traditions and social life.<sup>38</sup> Many worked in agriculture<sup>39</sup> as well as crafts and industry<sup>40</sup>. As a result, Polish settlements and villages were established where Polish was spoken and national traditions were nurtured.<sup>41</sup> For example, Polish settlements were formed in San Justo, near Rosario and Parana, which still bear witness to this heritage today.<sup>42</sup>

After the Second World War, between 1947–48, around 20,000 Polish veterans – including several generals, dozens of colonels and many non-commissioned officers – arrived in Argentina.<sup>43</sup> They were mainly soldiers of the Second Corps of the Polish Army, commanded by General Władysław Anders.<sup>44</sup> After the end of World War II, many Polish soldiers and war refugees were unable to return to their homeland due to the tumultuous political situation, which included the establishment of a communist regime. In search of a secure place to reside and work, a significant number of veterans chose to emigrate to Argentina, a country that actively encouraged immigration and provided favourable conditions for settlement.

<sup>34</sup> SMITH, Laurajane. El “espejo patrimonial”: ilusión narcisista o reflexiones múltiples? In: *Antípoda: Revista de Antropología y Arqueología*, 2011, pp. 39–63. ISSN: 1900-5407.

<sup>35</sup> CZERWIŃSKA, Kinga. Konwencja o ochronie niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego UNESCO w perspektywie dyskursu antropologicznego. In: *Studia Etnologiczne i Antropologiczne*, 12, 2012, pp. 218–228. ISSN: 2353-9860.

<sup>36</sup> KUBINA, Teodor. *Wśród polskiego wychodźstwa w Ameryce Południowej*. Potulice. 1938, ISBN: 83-01-12496-9.

<sup>37</sup> WŁODEK, Jan. *Emigracja polska do Argentyny*. 1923, Warszawa.

<sup>38</sup> KUCZYŃSKI, Edward. *Memorias de un Inmigrante Polaco*. Adrogué (Bs. As.). 2005, ISBN: 978-987-05-3337-7.

<sup>39</sup> ŁUKASZ, Dariusz; STEPIŃSKI, Rafał. Polskie osadnictwo chłopskie w argentyńskim Misiones od końca XIX w. do lat trzydziestych XX w. In: KULA, Marian (ed.). *Dzieje Polonii w Ameryce Łacińskiej*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1983, pp. 246–308. ISBN: 83-04-02753-6; THOMAS, William I.; ZNANIECKI, Florian. *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, t. V. Warszawa: LSW. 1976, ISBN: 83-206-0155-3.

<sup>40</sup> JANOWSKA, Helena. Emigracja z Polski w latach 1918–1939. In: PILCH, Andrzej (ed.). *Emigracja z ziem polskich w czasach nowożytnych i najnowszych*. Warszawa: PWN, 1984, pp. 326–450. ISBN: 83-01-07880-6.

<sup>41</sup> KOŁODZIEJ, Edward. *Dzieje Polonii w zarysie, 1918–1939*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza. 1991, ISBN: 83-05-12249-2.

<sup>42</sup> WRÓBEL, Antoni, Herkulan. Duszpasterstwo wśród emigracji polskiej w Argentynie w latach 1945–1997 i jego rola w środowiskach polonijnych. *Archiwum OO. Bernardynów w Martin Coronado*. 2020.

<sup>43</sup> SMOLANA, Kazimierz. Polonia w Argentynie. Rys historyczny. In: KULA, Marian (ed.). *Dzieje Polonii w Ameryce Łacińskiej*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1983, pp. 215–217. ISBN: 83-04-01674-0.

<sup>44</sup> POPELARCZYK-PAŁĘGA, Anna. Tożsamość Polonii argentyńskiej po roku 1945 – próba rekonstrukcji modelu przemian. In: *Polski misjonarz na ziemi argentyńskiej. Studia historyczne i politologiczne*, pod red. M. Szczerbińskiego i K. Wasilewskiego, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Stowarzyszenie Naukowe “Polska w Świecie”, 2011, pp. 325–337. ISBN: 978-83-933510-0-8.

Once on Argentinian land, these soldiers formed a close-knit community, supporting and helping each other to adapt to the new conditions. All Polish veterans arriving in Argentina after the end of the war immediately sought work to support themselves and start a new life.<sup>45</sup> Poles already living in Argentina provided them with assistance, supporting them in finding employment and housing, which enabled them to recreate their lives in a foreign homeland.<sup>46</sup>

The influx of such a large community of Polish soldiers and emigrants after World War II created a solid foundation for the establishment of institutions such as the Polish Army Museum in Martín Coronado. This institution is not limited to collecting exhibits; it also plays an important role in documenting, protecting and promoting Polish historical and cultural heritage in Argentina. The collected items, including weapons, uniforms, documents, photographs, personal memorabilia and everyday objects, constitute tangible evidence of the presence of Poles abroad and their efforts to preserve their national identity.

The museum also plays an educational and social role, enabling visitors to learn about the history of Polish soldiers and emigrants, gain insight into their experiences and develop an appreciation for the significance of Polish culture and tradition in Argentina. Additionally, the museum serves as a place of remembrance, preserving the history of war veterans, commemorating emigrants and fostering connections within the dispersed Polish community in South America.

## Formation of the Museum

The Lieutenant Doctor Antoni Solowiej Polish Army Museum in Martín Coronado is the only Polish historical–military institution in Argentina. Since its foundation in 1968, it has been located on the first floor of the Polish Saturday School of the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland, on the premises of the Polish Catholic Centre of the Franciscans (Bernardine Friars) in Martín Coronado.<sup>47</sup> Currently, the museum has five renovated rooms; the newest room opened in autumn 2024.

The museum's mission is to collect, preserve and store memorabilia related to Polish Army veterans of the Second World War. Visitors can see uniforms, medals of Polish heroes, equipment and numerous personal items belonging to veterans who took part in the liberation of Western Europe, Italy and Poland.

It was Lieutenant Doctor Antoni Solowiej,<sup>48</sup> along with other veterans of the Second Corps of General W. Anders, who took the initiative to create the first Polish Army Museum in Argentina.<sup>49</sup> Dr Solowiej was initiated the collection of surviving military memorabilia and was the lead organiser of the project.<sup>50</sup> He inaugurated the museum at a consecration ceremony

<sup>45</sup> PYZIK, Stanisław. *Los Polacos en la República Argentina y América del Sur desde el año 1812*. 1966, Buenos Aires.

<sup>46</sup> DEMBICZ, Andrzej (ed.). *Relacje Polska–Argentyna. Historia i współczesność*. Warszawa. 1996, ISBN: 83-85620-51-6.

<sup>47</sup> TWARÓG, Jerzy Jacek (2018). OO. Franciszkanie (Bernardyni) strażnicy polskiego dziedzictwa kulturowego w Argentynie. Referat wygłoszony na II Kongresie Latinoamerykanistycznym im. Ignacego Domeyki „40 lat PT-SL-Polskie badania w Ameryce Łacińskiej: doświadczenia i perspektywy”, pp. 1–10.

<sup>48</sup> GŁOS POLSKI (La Voz de Polonia), Antoni Solowiej (nekrolog), Buenos Aires, 1984a, Rok LXII – Nr 31 (3976) z 3 sierpnia 1984, pp. 10.

<sup>49</sup> ZYBERT, Elżbieta Barbara. The role of libraries, archives and museums (LAM) in the preservation of cultural heritage: the example of the Polish Catholic Centre in Martín Coronado in Argentina. In: *Przegląd Biblioteczny*, 87, 2019, pp. 73–90. Available at: <http://czasopisma.sbp.pl/przegląd-biblioteczny-2019-special-issue/>

<sup>50</sup> WIĘCKOWSKI, Marek (1986). Dr. Antoni Solowiej w Argentynie (1948–1984). In: Urbański Edmund Stefan, *Sylwetki Polskie w Ameryce Łacińskiej w XIX i XX wieku* (Uczni, Literaci, Artyści, Kler i Wojskowi), Vol. II, 1991: Artex Publishing, Inc., The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America, pp. 131–132.

performed by Cardinal Władysław Rubin on 13 October 1968.<sup>51</sup> To honour the achievements of Dr Soloviev, the museum was named after him: its current full name is the Lieutenant Doctor Antoni Solowiej Polish Army Museum.<sup>52</sup>

The museum is popular destination for tourists from Poland as well as members of the Polish community in Argentina. It is also visited by organised school groups, primarily from Buenos Aires. There are also visitors from other parts of the world, such as the United States, Asian countries (particularly Korea) and Europe, particularly Spain and Italy. Given the museum's significance in preserving Polish heritage, it is also a frequent stop for diplomats and politicians from Poland during business trips, with several visits occurring each year.

Thanks to its rich and diverse collections, the museum attracts historians, anthropologists and cultural studies scholars from various academic centres, mainly in Poland, who use the collected materials in their research and publications.

The museum is open on weekdays from 10 am to 4 pm and at weekends by prior arrangement, which is common practice. During the tour, visitors can listen to a multimedia commentary (available in Polish, Spanish or English) in each room. The commentary provides information about the exhibits and an overview of World War II, specifically the involvement of Polish soldiers in the conflict.

The collections in the museum were acquired through various methods, including both individual and institutional sources. Some of the exhibits were donated by the families of Polish World War II veterans or by the soldiers themselves. Additionally, the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw has donated items to the collection, adding unique objects of historical and cultural significance.

The collections at the Polish Army Museum in Martín Coronado are meticulously preserved, carefully stored and fully accessible to visitors. The museum exclusively features permanent exhibitions, with all items being displayed in glass cases for both protection and educational purposes. This allows visitors to view and learn about each item in the collection in a safe and organised manner.

The Polish Army Museum in Martín Coronado serves as a cultural and educational institution with the main objective of collecting, preserving and showcasing Polish historical and cultural heritage in Argentina. The museum operates under a regulated statute that outlines its responsibilities, organisational structure and operational guidelines within the Polish community. The institution operates with the support of Polish associations and its own administrative staff. This staff includes individuals who are responsible for maintaining the collections, coordinating exhibitions and conducting educational and scientific initiatives.

The museum is led by Jerzy Twaróg, its curator and current administrator, who offers professional and informative guidance to visitors. He plays a crucial role in ensuring the smooth operation of the institution, overseeing the proper storage of exhibits and making the collections accessible to a diverse audience.

Admission to the museum is free, although the museum accepts voluntary donations from visitors which support its activities and promotion, contributing to the maintenance and further development of the institution. This type of financing model promotes knowledge

<sup>51</sup> RAWA-JASIŃSKI, Aleksander (1968). Historyczna Wizyta (XI). In: *Kurier Polski*. Buenos Aires, Rok XII – Nr 589 z 12 grudnia, pp. 3. ISSN: 0324-1064.

<sup>52</sup> GEŚLA, Ryszard Kazimierz (2022). Działalność misyjna i polonijna bernardynów w Argentynie (1957–2018). Rozprawa doktorska napisana na Wydziale Teologicznym UKSW, w Katedrze Misjologii, pod kierunkiem O. Prof. Dra Hab. Jarosława Różańskiego, Warszawa, pp. 1–241.

about Polish historical and cultural heritage in Argentina and strengthens the museum's role as a guardian of historical memory about Polish soldiers and the émigré community.

Thanks to financial support from the Senate of the Republic of Poland and the Polish Community Association, the museum was renovated in 2017. Upon completion of the renovation, the new exhibition, occupying four halls, was ceremonially opened on December 17, 2017. In 2024, the museum was expanded with an additional hall and enriched with several hundred new exhibits. It is now one of the largest and richest Polish military museums in South America in terms of collections.

## Objective and methods

This study explores how the Polish Army Museum in Martín Coronado carries out tasks related to documenting, protecting and presenting Polish historical and cultural heritage in Argentina, and examines the significance of the collections with regard to the memory of Polish soldiers and the émigré community.

Another objective of the study was to identify elements of Poland's cultural heritage in Argentina present due to the collecting and gathering museum exhibits. This was achieved through an inventory and library search of relevant archives in Buenos Aires: in Domeyki Library, located in Polish House, and in the archives of the Bernardine Friars in Martín Coronado.

An inventory of all the objects in the Polish Army Museum in Martín Coronado was created, categorised according to the various rooms of the museum, along with a list of the original owners of the various artefacts in the museum. The inventory of museum artefacts was made by the authors in December 2024 and in January 2025.

The inventory was compiled in a systematic and thorough manner, following museum principles. Each exhibit was carefully identified and catalogued, taking into consideration its key characteristics such as its name, type, material, dimensions, condition, origin and date of acquisition or donation. The process utilised both paper and electronic documentation, enabling continuous monitoring of the condition of the collections and their placement within specific rooms of the museum.

While cataloguing individual objects, they were carefully allocated to the appropriate museum rooms, taking into account their subject matter, function and historical context. The collected objects were arranged according to type and historical significance, making them easy to present and accessible to visitors, while also facilitating future research into the history of Polish military heritage in Argentina.

## Exhibits collected at the Polish Army Museum in Martín Coronado

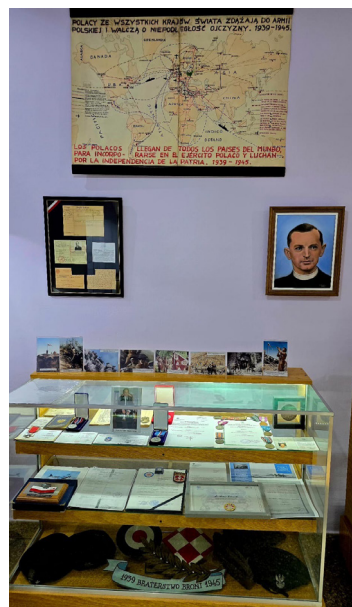
Currently (as of January 2025), the museum has 1,502 exhibits located in five halls (Appendix 1). The exhibits belonged to, among others, 69 Polish WWII veterans (Appendix 2) most of whom served in the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division, the 5th Border Infantry Division, or the 2nd Warsaw Armoured Division. Former Polish soldiers donated salvaged personal effects from camps in Russia and Germany, such as chasubles, prayer books, medicines from the war first aid kit, spoons, mess kits, pots, glasses and many others items to the museum.

The Museum contains memorabilia from many heroes who contributed to the success of the Polish Army, including figures such as General Jerzy Zawisza, Lieutenant Jan Gilowski (Photo 1), Captain Pilot Antoni Żebrowski (Photo 2), Captain Pilot Marek Jan Czerwiński, Colonel

Władysław Dąbrowski (Photo 3), Lieutenant Franciszek Ślusarz (Photo 4), Naval Officer Luis Enrique Raczkowski (Photo 5) and Second Lieutenant Jerzy Wojno (Photo 6). Their stories, achievements and sacrifices constitute an important part of the exhibition, reminding us of the indomitable struggle and dedication of those who took part in the key events of the Second World War, both on the European front and beyond.



**Photo 1:** Memorabilia from Captain Pilot Jan Gilowski. Photo: K. Ziółkowska-Weiss.



**Photo 2:** Memorabilia from Captain Pilot Antoni Żebrowski. Photo: K. Ziółkowska-Weiss.



**Photo 3:** Memorabilia from Colonel Władysław Dąbrowski. Photo: K. Ziółkowska-Weiss.



**Photo 4:** Memorabilia from Lieutenant Franciszek Ślusarz. Photo: K. Ziółkowska-Weiss.



**Photo 5:** Memorabilia from Lieutenant Luis Enrique Raczkowski. Photo: K. Ziolkowska-Weiss.



**Photo 6:** Memorabilia from Second Lieutenant Jerzy Wojno. Photo: K. Ziolkowska-Weiss.



The Polish Army Museum in Martin Coronado serves as a poignant reminder of the cruel manifestations of evil that took place during the Second World War. It not only pays tribute to all those who were involved in the Second World War, but also to soldiers of Polish descent who fought in the Falklands War in the Malvinas Islands in 1982. It honours all courageous individuals who became symbols of sacrifice and martyrdom in the face of unimaginable suffering and death. One such figure is Saint Father Maximilian Maria Kolbe (Photo 7), a Franciscan who gave his life for another man in the Auschwitz–Birkenau camp. Through its exhibits, sheds light on the tragic fate of victims, while highlighting the inspiring stories of saints who offered hope and selflessness during the darkest times in history.

**Photo 7:** Chasuble Saint Father Maximilian Maria Kolbe. Photo: K. Ziolkowska-Weiss.

The museum also houses memorabilia related to the founders of the monastery, church and Polish school in the town of Martin Coronado: Fathers Justinian Maciaszek and Andrzej Smolen. The Polish Catholic Centre of the Franciscan Fathers in Martin Coronado,

colloquially referred to as “Maciaszkowe” by Polish people living in Argentina, acquired its name in honour of Father Justinian Maciaszek. One of the most valuable exhibits in the museum is the original red and white flag from the 1944 Warsaw Uprising (Photo 8), which belonged to the women’s scout troop of the Zośka Battalion in Martin Coronado. This flag is a symbol of the heroic struggle and serves as a unique memento of the Polish scouting movement abroad.



**Photo 8:** Red and white flag from the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. Photo: K. Ziółkowska-Weiss.

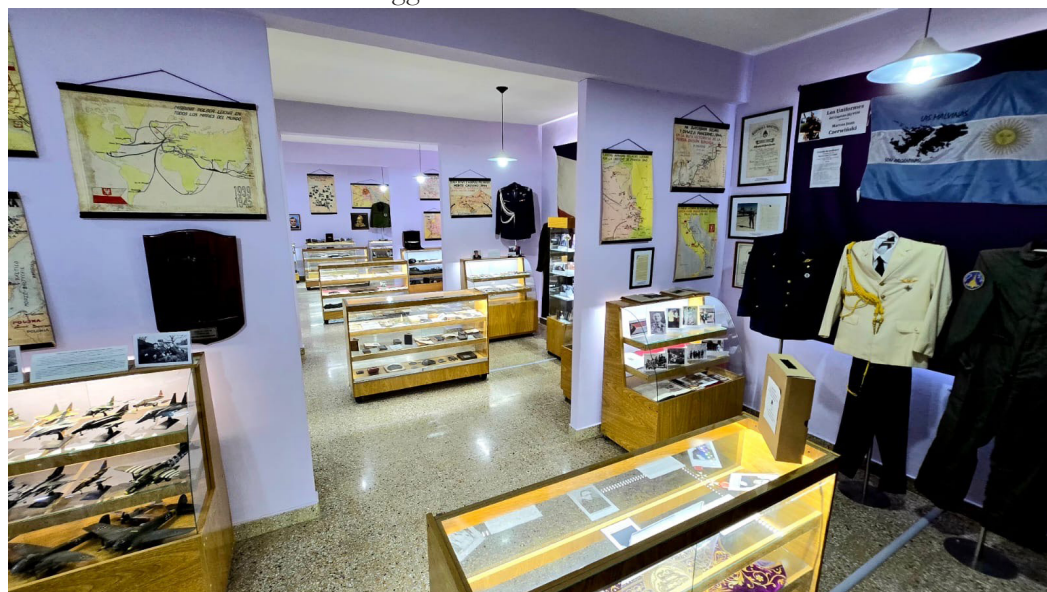
There are currently five rooms in the museum. In the first room (Photo 9) is a gallery featuring 22 paintings by Lieutenant Jan Gilowski, who was a painter as well as a soldier. These priceless Second World War-themed works depict the Carpathians and were painted on canvases in soldiers’ tents during the stay of the Second Corps in Persia and other parts of the world. They go further than depicting the heroic struggle of the Polish soldiers, as they also bear witness to the emotions and memories of those who fought for freedom. The room also displays the symbols of 16 Polish Air Force battalions, also painted by Gilowski. In one corner there is a large metal suitcase belonging to the soldier Władysław Sempoliński, accompanied by two field beds and a sleeping bag, providing a glimpse into soldiers’ daily life during the war. The exhibition thus conveys a powerful artistic message while also allowing visitors to feel a sense of closeness to the history created by the heroes of that time.

The second room of the museum (Photo 10) showcases exhibits related to Polish veterans of the Second World War, as well as memorabilia of Argentine soldiers of Polish descent who played a significant role in the 1982 Falklands (Malvinas) War against the United Kingdom. Among the items on display are uniforms of Polish heroes, such as General Jerzy Zawisza, Captain Pilot Marek Czerwiński and naval officer Luis Raczkowski. For younger visitors, there is a collection of 45 miniature combat aircraft and a fighter pilot’s catapult, providing an interactive experience of military aviation history. A shell core from the General Belgrano war-



**Photo 9:** *The first room of the museum.* Photo: K. Ziółkowska-Weiss.

ship, donated to the museum by veterans of the Malvinas War from the town of Concordia, is another valuable exhibit. These memorabilia not only serve as a testament to bravery and sacrifice, they also hold great historical significance, uniting different generations and peoples in the remembrance of shared struggles.



**Photo 10:** *Second room of the museum.* Photo: K. Ziółkowska-Weiss.

The third room of the museum (Photo 11) houses the Relics of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe, a Polish Franciscan and martyr of the Auschwitz–Birkenau camp. The presence of these relics gives the room a spiritual dimension, recalling the sacrifice and steadfast faith that were the

foundation of the lives of many who went through the hell of war. The room also contains prayer books that belonged to Polish soldiers as well as more than a dozen uniforms that were worn by military heroes. Numerous crosses, medals and decorations belonging to Second World War veterans are displayed in illuminated showcases as symbols of their courage and sacrifice. Four more paintings created during the war by Lieutenant Jan Gilowski hang on the walls, alongside numerous maps, which provide both an artistic and emotional record of those tragic events. This room is full of stories and memories that touch visitors' hearts, making them reflect on human suffering, faith and hope in the darkest of times.



**Photo 11:** *Third room of the museum.* Photo: K. Ziółkowska-Weiss.

In the fourth room (Photo 12), the flags of Poland and Argentina are prominently displayed, serving as a powerful symbol of the strong relationship and shared heritage between the two nations. The room itself is adorned with glass display cases illuminated to showcase the exhibits within. Additionally, the walls are adorned with maps generously donated by the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland, Enrique Juan Koprowski of Comodoro Rivadavia. These maps, described in both Polish and Spanish, depict the movements of military forces during the Second World War (1939–45) in Poland and around the world. At the heart of the room is a special exhibit – a Polish flag from the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, serving as a poignant symbol of heroism and unwavering determination.

This room showcases the uniforms worn by Polish veterans during the war and in exile in Argentina, as well as memorabilia from 24 soldiers from the Vistula River. Among the items on display are those belonging to notable figures such as Antoni Sołowiej – the founder of the museum, Jerzy Zawisza, Antoni Żebrowski, Władysław Dąbrowski and Franciszek Ślusarz. In addition to cornets, berets and caps, the exhibition also features crosses, medals, personal documents and ID cards of Polish soldiers. This room is a unique highlight of the museum, offering a glimpse into the individual stories of these heroes and the broader context of the wartime and emigration experiences of Polish soldiers.



**Photo 12:** *Fourth room of the museum.* Photo: K. Ziolkowska-Weiss.

The new hall (Photo 13), which opened in November 2024, contains exhibits dedicated to Colonel Wincenty Sobociński (Photo 14), a war hero who displayed great courage and dedication during the Second World War. He was born on July 14, 1894 in Murzynno, Poland, and joined the Polish Army after the outbreak of war. Sobociński was the last head of the Military Department of the General Commissariat of the Republic of Poland in the Free City of Gdańsk.



**Photo 13:** *The new hall of the museum.* Photo: K. Ziolkowska-Weiss.



**Photo 14:** *Museum Memorabilia of Wincent Sobociński.* Photo: K. Ziolkowska-Weiss.

Sobociński fought on various fronts, ultimately becoming a member of the Polish armed forces, taking part in many dramatic events of the war. After the end of hostilities he found himself in exile in Argentina, where he died on July 29, 1959. On November 7, 2023, his remains were exhumed from St Isabella's cemetery in Merlo (Buenos Aires) and given a farewell by the Argentinean Polish community at Marian Sanctuary in Lujan. Thanks to the efforts of the Colonel Wincenty Sobociński Association, his ashes were brought back to Poland by Father Jerzy Jacek Twaróg on 23 December 2023 and placed in the St Bridget's Church in Gdansk. On August 31, 2024, farewell ceremonies were held in Gdansk and at Westerplatte in the presence of representatives of state authorities. The following day, Colonel Sobociński was laid to rest in his hometown of Murzynno with a military ceremony. The Polish Army Museum in Martin Coronado, Buenos Aires now houses a dedicated hall showcasing the history and exhibits of Colonel Wincent Sobociński.

It is worth quoting the words of historians Elżbieta Zybert and Elżbieta Maruszak, who stated after visiting that

The restoration of the museum has made it possible to secure and classify the exhibits it contains in a professional manner and has opened its doors wide to compatriots and all those interested in the history of the twentieth century. Undoubtedly, through the power of the authentic objects it exhibits, it provides a valuable reference point and perhaps a supplement to the history of the Second World War.<sup>53</sup>

Thanks to the conducted renovation, the museum has become even more valuable as a place that not only collects historical memorabilia but effectively conveys knowledge about one of the most important periods in the history of the twentieth century.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusions

Cultural heritage, in museum terms, is a set of values, norms, traditions and human creations that shape national, regional or local identity.<sup>55</sup> In the context of a museum, it acts as a carrier of knowledge about the past and a living testimony of human experience. Cultural heritage stored in the form of artefacts, works of art, documents or traditions is central to understanding human history and forms a bridge between the past and the present.<sup>56</sup>

The results of the study confirm that the Polish Army Museum in Martin Coronado, Buenos Aires, carries out tasks related to documenting, protecting and presenting Polish historical and cultural heritage in Argentina in a consistent and comprehensive manner. The institution collects and systematically catalogues artefacts from Polish soldiers and their families, as well as from Polish community organisations and national museums, enabling the preservation authentic testimonies regarding the fate of Polish veterans in South America. Through the thematic arrangement of exhibits, their proper conservation and public accessibility, the museum serves as a centre for reconstructing Polish military history outside the borders of the country.

<sup>53</sup> ZYBERT, Elżbieta Barbara and MARUSZAK, Elżbieta. *Do Polski idziemy przez cały świat. Karpatczycy na obrazach Jana Gilowskiego*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Aspra-JR, 2018, p. 9. ISBN 978-83-7557-304-6.

<sup>54</sup> TWARÓG, Jerzy Jacek. Muzeum Wojska Polskiego im. Por. Dra Antoniego Sołowicja w Martin Coronado. In: *Nurt SVD*, 153, 2023, pp. 333–345. ISSN: 1898-019X.

<sup>55</sup> BURSIEWICZ, Natalia. Architektura (Turystyka architektoniczna): w poszukiwaniu „spektakularnych” obiektów. In: *Turystyka Kulturowa*, 5, 2019, pp. 7–26. ISSN: 2084-2265.

<sup>56</sup> TILDEN, Freeman (2019). *Interpretacja dziedzictwa*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Centrum Turystyki Kulturowej TRAKT. ISBN: 978-83-62415-46-5.

The role and essence of culture and heritage in a museum are invaluable as these institutions perform educational, social and cultural functions. Museums are spaces where objects that have historical, artistic, scientific and cultural value are stored, studied and displayed. Through them, cultural heritage – both tangible and intangible – can be passed on to future generations and become accessible to a wide audience.<sup>57</sup>

As part of its educational activities, the Polish Army Museum in Martín Coronado cooperates on a permanent basis with the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland Polish Saturday School in Martín Coronado (Buenos Aires), which is attended by children from the Polish community in order to learn the Polish language and culture. Furthermore, the institution maintains active contacts with the Polish House in Buenos Aires. Within the framework of this cooperation, the museum organises annual meetings and educational events on key national dates, such as Polish National Flag Day on May 2 and National Independence Day on November 11.

During these celebrations, special attention is paid to cultivating Polish identity and commemorating the history of Polish soldiers. The meetings at the museum include guided tours of the exhibitions combined with an introductory lecture, while the cooperation with the school includes educational workshops during which children solve educational tasks, engage in art projects and sing Polish patriotic songs. These activities facilitate practical implementation of the educational and cultural program, enabling the young Polish diaspora to gain a deeper understanding of national history and traditions.

Museums, through their role in the protection of cultural heritage, help to preserve unique objects that may have significance not only for a particular community, but also for humanity as a whole.<sup>58</sup> Museums thus become institutions that cultivate values and traditions, promote cultural diversity and foster social integration and intercultural dialogue.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, in the contemporary world, museums serve both as preservers of history and as educators, providing engaging spaces for visitors.<sup>60</sup> They offer opportunities for individuals to gain a deeper understanding of the past and its influence on the present, as well as to reflect on the future.<sup>61</sup> In this sense, museums play a crucial role in shaping cultural and social identities, promoting respect for diversity and fostering understanding of different cultures and traditions.<sup>62</sup>

Thanks to its activities, the Polish Army Museum in Martín Coronado enjoys a great deal of interest from compatriots from Poland, including official government delegations as well as the Argentine population. These unique memorabilia not only nurture Polishness, they also preserve the memory of Polish soldiers, making a huge contribution to the preservation and dissemination of Polish cultural heritage and protecting it from oblivion.

<sup>57</sup> LEWIS, Geoffrey. (ed.). *Running a Museum: A Practical Handbook*. ICOM. Available at: [http://icom.museum/uploads/tx\\_hpoindexbdd/practical\\_handbook.pdf](http://icom.museum/uploads/tx_hpoindexbdd/practical_handbook.pdf) [Retrieved April, 11, 2025]. 2004, ISBN: 978-92-9012-357-3.

<sup>58</sup> MAŁEK, Joanna. Turystyka kulturowa jako czynnik rozwoju lokalnego. In: *Prace i Studia Geograficzne*, 32, 2003, pp. 13–34. ISSN: 0208-4589 (druk), 2543-7313 (online).

<sup>59</sup> POP, Izabela, Luiza. and BORZA, Anca. Factors Influencing Museum Sustainability and Indicators for Museum Sustainability Measurement. In: *Sustainability*, 8(1), 2016, Article 101. Available at: <http://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/8/1/101> [Retrieved February 25, 2017]. ISSN: 2071-1050

<sup>60</sup> STAIFF, Russell. *Re-imagining heritage interpretation: enchanting the past-future*. London: Routledge. 2016, ISBN: 978-1-4094-5550-9.

<sup>61</sup> KACZMAREK, Krzysztof. Turystyka archeologiczna. In: *Turystyka Kulturowa*, 1, 2010, pp. 4–13. ISSN: 1897-3584.

<sup>62</sup> NAVARRETE, Trilce. and OWEN, Mackenzie, John. The Museum as Information Space: Metadata and Documentation. In: BOROWIECKI, Karol, Jan., FORBES, N. and FRESA, A. (eds.). *Cultural Heritage in a Changing World*. SpringerOpen, 2016, pp. 322–344. ISBN: 978-3-319-29542-8.

The Polish Army Museum in Martin Coronado plays a crucial role in promoting Polish heritage activities outside of Poland, preserving and enhancing the world's cultural legacy by showcasing unique aspects of Polish history and its heroes. Through documenting and promoting events related to Polish history, the museum serves as an educational tool that helps shape a modern sense of patriotism, offering reminders of important moments in the past while encouraging creative thinking and reflection on the value of tradition and national heritage. Thanks to the museum, successive generations are able to develop a deep respect for their history and become aware of their roots, while remaining open to dialogue with other cultures and the world.

Although it may seem that the future of museology will be heavily influenced by the development of narrative multimedia museums,<sup>63</sup> the author of this article believes that authentic exhibits will remain at the heart of any exhibition. It serves as an introduction and starting point for telling a captivating story, creating specific scenes and images, and providing a multidimensional understanding of the subject matter for visitors. The Polish Army Museum in Martin Coronado will undoubtedly fulfil this function, bringing the history of Polish heroes fighting on the front lines closer not only to the Argentinean Polish community but also to tourists from around the world.

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<sup>63</sup> NOWACKI, Marek. Interpretacja dziedzictwa w XXI wieku: kreatywność, ko-kreacja i publiczny dyskurs w ekonomii doświadczeń. In: *Turystyka Kulturowa*, 3, 2020, pp. 12–40. ISSN: 2083-3036.

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