

Polish National School System in Teschen Silesia in 17th–19th Centuries

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The article begins by introducing the beginnings of schooling in the Teschen Silesia region. It then continues to map the situation after the introduction of compulsory education. The development of schools and the network of schooling institutions are covered, as well as school curricula and the position and competence of teachers in the 17th to 19th centuries. Physical didactic aids of this period are examined, especially textbooks.

Finally, the article deals with the issues connected with Germanisation and the national struggle and awareness of the Polish population in the Teschen Silesia region; with the impact of Hasner's law (Leopold Hasner von Artha) on the development of the national school system in the region; with important figures and organisations that played a significant role in the political, cultural and economic changes in society in Teschen Silesia.

Keywords: Cieszyn Silesia, polish school, national consciousness, ethnic structure of the population

Annotation: This article deals with Polish national schooling in Teschen Silesia between the 17th and 19th centuries.

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Origins of the School System in Teschen Silesia

The origins of schooling were closely connected with the church. The oldest schools were founded as part of monasteries, i.e. monastic schools, or in larger parishes as part of parsonages or churches, i.e. parish schools. Teachers, too, were initially clergymen, and later secular people started to work as their assistants. The first schools were founded in the important cities of the region (Teschen 1331, Opava 1372 and Frydek 1490). Parish schools mainly taught reading, writing and elementary maths while its major part also focused on teaching religion and singing religious songs¹. The teacher was frequently also the church organist.

During the reformation, schools were mostly evangelical, part of evangelical parsonages. The Catholic Church did not have any schools, at least not officially; it is highly likely however that the church ran schooling in secret, intended for Catholic children whose families could not afford private teachers. During the reintroduction of Catholicism, the situation in schooling in Teschen Silesia changed².

After the death of Duchess Elizabeth Lucretia, the Habsburg's religious and enlightenment policy started to shape teaching. The goal of school was to reinforce positive feelings and thoughts towards the Habsburg Monarchy, raising people loyal to the emperor and supporters of the monarchy³.

During this period, school also became a tool to reinstate Catholicism in the Lutheran lands, which was reflected mainly in the level of secondary schools (with the foundation of a Latin grammar school in Teschen in 1674).

Introduction of Compulsory Education

Because economic growth required increasing the literacy of the population and the quality of school system, a modern education system was created during the reign of Maria Theresa and her son Joseph II. During Maria Theresa's reign an academy of science was established with branches in respective territories. Education in the Duchy of Teschen fell under the competence of the Silesian Provincial Government in Opava, which in 1782 was subordinated to the Moravian-Silesian Gubernium in Brno⁴.

In 1774, Maria Theresa issued the General School Ordinance for normal, main and trivial schools in all imperial hereditary lands, which brought compulsory schooling for children aged 6 to 12 years. Trivial schools in the Teschen area taught in Czech and Ger-

¹ F. Popiołek, *Dzieje Śląska Austriackiego*, Cieszyn 1913, Cieszyńska Drukarnia Wydawnicza.

² A. Kubacz, *Szkolnictwo na Śląsku Cieszyńskim do końca XVII wieku*. „Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka” no. 2, 2005, pp. 125–126, pp. 132–133.

³ I. Panic, *Z dziejów szkolnictwa średniego w Księstwie Cieszyńskim w czasach nowożytnych (do 1773)*. Cieszyn 1995, Liceum im. A. Osuchowskiego w Cieszynie.

⁴ K. Mozor, *Szkolnictwo katolickie w cieszyńskim Wikariacie Generalnym 1770–1925*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PAT, Krakow 2002.

man and later Polish⁵ (Polish as a language of instruction was introduced into trivial schools in 1851. In schools, Polish-language textbooks were also used in teaching). Children from 12 to 15 honed their knowledge in Sunday schools, also called revision schools. Schooling ended with a public exam⁶.

The development of education was also accelerated by the abolishment of serfdom in 1781 – the servants no longer needed the approval of their landlord for their children's education; and the Patent of Toleration, which allowed Lutheranism, Calvinism and the Orthodox Christian Church to co-exist with the Roman Catholic Church. The Jewish faith was also tolerated after 1782. These churches were allowed to found their schools, which especially in Teschen led to a large number of new schools. In 1808 the Teschen Silesia region had 60 Catholic schools (other source states 61 schools)⁷ and 25 Evangelical schools,⁸ together with two grammar schools (Catholic and Evangelical)⁹ – which is a large step forward if we compare the situation to the seventeenth century, which saw 30 schools¹⁰ in 33 parishes (some sources indicate 33 schools)¹¹.

The Teacher's Position

The work of the teacher, especially in village schools, consisted of teaching the youth, but often the teacher was also the sexton (cleaning the church, ringing the bell), parsonage clerk, registrar, municipal authority clerk or organist playing at masses and funerals, they assisted during church ceremonies, sometimes even prepared the hosts and carol-singing wafers. School work was only one of their duties¹². This was true in the 17th century as well as the 19th century – until 1869, doing church service was an official and important part of a teacher's income. After the 1869 reform, teachers' wages were supposed to increase enough to allow them to focus solely on their education activities, however the idea remained in the realm of wishful thinking, and teachers towards the end of the 19th century still had to do other things to earn the extra money they required.

⁵ A. Kubacz, *Wpływy reform tereziańskich i józefińskich na rozwój szkolnictwa na Śląsku Cieszyńskim*, Materials from a conference held in Cieszyn, 4–5 November 1999, Cieszyn 2001, p. 138.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 138.

⁷ J. Król, *Szkolnictwo ewangelickie na Śląsku Cieszyńskim w XIX i XX wieku*. „Rocznik Cieszyński”, no. III, 1976, Cieszyn, pp. 11–13.

⁸ J. Chlebowczyk, *Szkolnictwo na przełomie wieków. O komornikach i głodnych rokach*. 1984, Katowice, SIN.

⁹ J. Król, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–13.

¹⁰ A. Grobelný, *Městské školy na Těšínsku do konce 17. století*. „Slezský Sborník“, no. 51, 1953; A. Grobelný, *Venkovské školy na panství Těšínské a Bílské komory v 17. století*, „Slezský Sborník”, no. 54, 1956, p. 379.

¹¹ F. Popiołek, *op. cit.*

¹² W. Ostrowski, *Wiejskie szkolnictwo parafialne na Śląsku w drugiej połowie XVII wieku (w świetle wizytacji kościelnych)*, Wrocław 1971, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich – Wydawnictwo.

Official numbers from 1900 records show that 23% of teaching staff from public schools were doing exactly that¹³.

Teachers in parish and trivial schools, especially in villages, were only able to read and write themselves; sometimes they were former soldiers with some knowledge of German¹⁴. Anyone considering themselves able to teach youths could become a teacher in the 17th century. Statistics from the Diocese of Opole, which included the Teschen deanery, show that the majority of teachers had an elementary village school education; only 10% had a grammar school education, 14% finished Latin school; and 15% of teachers came from city elementary schools¹⁵. Data from 1805, put together by the statistician L. J. Szersznik, show 56 Catholic schools in Teschen which employed 60 teachers and 6 assistants, of which only 6 completed the necessary teacher studies¹⁶. The situation changed in the second half of the 19th century. The introduction of Hasner's Law required teachers to have qualifications obtained in teacher institutions. Prior to 1869, teachers were educated in preparands, only teachers in evangelical schools were more often educated at evangelical grammar schools. Despite Hasner's Law, unqualified teachers were still employed due to a lack of qualified ones, especially in villages. The situation changed towards the end of the 19th century, which saw the majority of teachers employed having the necessary qualifications.

Statistical data from the time shows that in the 17th century almost 60% of the teachers did not have the relevant knowledge and skills to teach in elementary schools. Moreover, inspections often showed that children were being educated by semi-illiterate teachers, or teachers addicted to alcohol, who were aggressive and beat the children¹⁷.

In village schools, especially in the 17th century, there were teachers who spoke in the local dialect¹⁸. Statistical data from the Schlesischer Schulschematismus of 1897 show that over 70% of the teachers came from the region, 11 % from Moravia and the rest from Galicia inland, Opavia and the Prussian part of Silesia¹⁹. This had an undeniably positive impact on the development of the culture, traditions and language of the Teschen region.

¹³ M. Bogus, *Nędza z bidą w parze idą. O sytuacji nauczycieli w XIX wieku* in: Bogus Marzena (ed.): *Język-škola-prostor jako determinanty kulturního vývoje Těšínského Slezska*. 2012, Český Těšín, Kongres Poláků v ČR.

¹⁴ P. Łaboj, *Kronika szkół ludowych w Końskiej 1792–1960*, manuscript, pp. 15–16.

¹⁵ W. Ostrowski, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ A. Kubacz, *Szkolnictwo na Śląsku Cieszyńskim...*, pp. 125–155.

¹⁷ J. Krukowski, *Nauczyciele szkół parafialnych Krakowa w XVII wieku*, Kraków 2001, Prace Monograficzne Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego.

¹⁸ A. Kubacz, *Szkolnictwo na Śląsku Cieszyńskim*, pp. 125–155.

¹⁹ *Schlesischer Schulschematismus*, Troppau 1897, pp. 188–193.

The curriculum in Parish and Trivial Schools

Teachers in parish and trivial schools could often only barely read and write themselves. An example of such a teacher was Jan Kajzar of Konska who taught from 1801–1838 at an evangelical school in Konska. He could only just read and write, and learned a few German words during his military service²⁰. Such “teacher qualifications” were reflected in the knowledge children gained at school. At novice level, children only learned to read and count orally, and only at the subsequent level did they learn to write and do basic sums on paper²¹.

Although at the turn of the 18th century, the curriculum contents were legislated, there were significant differences in individual schools, caused mostly by the lack of qualified teachers, the low attractiveness of underfunded parish schools and also by the small numbers of children attending.

The situation did not improve much during the 1850s and 1860s. Jan Kubisz describes a school day at such a school in his book *Pamiętnik starego nauczyciela* (Diary of an Old Teacher). “I started to learn to read from a Polish primer... Every pupil learned independently, on their own. Group learning and revision did not exist. The teacher did not give any lectures, only explained something from time to time. Pupils had to learn the given subject matter by their own effort and in their own way. It was difficult and in our opinion un-pedagogical. The teaching started with recognising the letters, the alphabet... Later on, pupils put letters into syllables and syllables into words. Reading the words created from syllables without pronouncing the individual letters was done “like so”. It was hard. I remember the labour of learning to read the Polish word “wszczał”. The children were tested individually by the teacher in front of the class. If the child failed, they were sent back to their seat to learn it thoroughly once more. The book they had to read was the New Testament. It was read by older pupils who could already read, of course. In the third grade, the field of study widened. Besides reading, there was also catechism. We learned catechism and religion by heart. Biblical stories were taught by the teacher, assigning one story to the older children and the pupils had to tell the story in the next class. Besides that, every day before noon, one pupil read one biblical story to the whole classroom. This way, religion became the central point of learning. German was another important part of schooling. Children learned vocabulary and then German dialogues ... Children had to learn everything by heart, which required a lot of work. Great importance was put on penmanship – calligraphy. A relatively large amount of lessons per week were devoted to it. There were Polish and German text examples. Mathematics was taught by teaching us to write numerals and then counting to one hundred. This was followed by addition – first whole numbers, then decimals up to a hundred. It was the same with subtraction, multiplication and division, which was also done with whole numbers and decimals. Only at higher levels was the arithmetic developed, but still counting with whole numbers and the four operations. That was maths at school...

²⁰ P. Laboj, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–16.

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 15–16.

In singing lessons we learned from the Tranovsky hymnbook. We also learned to draw, which was called “painting”. The teacher used a ruler to draw a church building on the blackboard – I can still see the church the teacher drew back then – then the whole class drew it the same way onto their tablets. These classes were not regular, they only happened occasionally. Although we knew the teacher would draw the church again, we were happy with every class of painting, because it was always something new for us”²².

School quality increased with the introduction of the Hasner’s Law. It extended compulsory education to eight years, established general and civic schools, and introduced new subjects: biology, geography, physical education, handiwork and mensuration. It also legislated the secondary school qualification requirement for teachers, who then had to complete studies at teacher institutions.

Germanisation and Textbooks in Moravian

The role of the German language strengthened during the reign of Joseph II, helped by the centralisation of state offices which used a single administrative language – German. The use of Polish at schools was further suppressed in 1782 by the unification of Moravia and Silesia into a single Moravian-Silesian Gubernium seated in Brno. Due to this administrative centralisation, Moravian textbooks and teachers from Moravia started pouring into Teschen Silesia schools. These teachers taught in their native tongue, namely the Moravian dialect²³. The Moravian influences and Germanisation were both limited in 1804 when trivial schools came under church supervision. The church oversight over trivial schools commenced the struggle for the language rights of the population using the Silesian-Polish dialect²⁴. Representatives of the church were bound to the region and often born in it. L. J. Szersznik became the overseer of education in the Teschen Silesia region and greatly helped in the development of Teschen culture. This Teschen-born priest fought for the introduction of Polish textbooks in the first grades of trivial schools, which were more accessible than Czech textbooks to Teschen Silesia pupils who spoke Teschen or Silesian-Polish dialects. Because teaching at village trivial schools was dominated by the use of local dialect, textbooks written in Czech or Moravian were not effective as study material; pupils did not understand them and the teaching was slowed down by the teacher having to translate the textbook material to the local dialect²⁵. L. J. Szersznik fought to introduce new textbooks at trivial schools, which would replace the then popular Czech textbook *Primer for Village Schools* published in 1781 and later

²² K. Jaworski, *220 lat szkolnictwa w Końskiej*, Trzyniec-Końska-Osówki 2011: MK PZKO.

²³ J. Macura, *Z dziejów polskiego szkolnictwa na Zaolziu*. Towarzystwo Nauczycieli Polskich w Republice Czeskiej. Cieszyn 1998, Towarzystwo Nauczycieli Polskich w Republice Czeskiej.

²⁴ A. Adamus, *Jazyková otázka ve škole na Těšínsku*, Moravská Ostrava 1930.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

also the Reader and Grammar Book for General Schools published in 1840²⁶. He achieved that only in 1877 when the district authority in Teschen introduced new textbooks written in Polish.

Fight for National Education

During the revolution of 1848 the Teschen Silesian populace fought for the introduction of Polish in local schools. While spearheaded mainly by representatives of the Church, the communes organised a mission to visit the emperor himself. These activities helped push the Austrian government to create a constitutional monarchy in which individual countries had their own language and political rights; this led to the introduction of Polish in the schools and offices of the Teschen Silesia region²⁷. Later on the use of Polish as the language of instruction at schools was supported by the Hasner's Law²⁸. Hasner's Law of 1869 had a significant impact on national schooling, and helped develop national schooling in Teschen Silesia region, as it instructed schools to use the language that is the native language of pupils, which meant the wider use of Polish in schools in the region²⁹. The law introduced compulsory 8-year education and improved the quality of education in the region in many aspects – e.g. the material position of teachers and increased participation of children in schooling. The number of schools increased; there was a school in every town, moreover, besides general Polish schools, civic Polish schools and secondary Polish schools, i.e. technical schools, grammar schools, “Realschulen” and teacher institutions³⁰.

An important role in the fight for national schooling in Teschen Silesia was played by teachers Jan Śliwka and Jan Kotas of Konska who together created nine textbooks written in Polish for Teschen Silesia schools; and Jerzy Kubisz and his eight colleagues who in 1888 founded the Polish Education Association in Ustroń – the first professional organisation of Polish teachers in the region³¹. This organisation became the Polish Teaching Society, with headquarters in Ustroń (Polskie Towarzystwo Pedagogiczne).

However, the German authorities considered the abovementioned status to be harmful to German interests in the area and decided to fight against it. In 1873 a law on general schools was issued, which introduced German into all schools, therefore leaving only German schools or Utraquist schools (bilingual). In villages, where Utraquist schools

²⁶ K. Mozor, *op. cit.*

²⁷ J. Londzin, *Polskość Śląska Cieszyńskiego*. 1924, Cieszyn, Drukarnia Dziedzictwa w Cieszynie.

²⁸ K. Buzek, *Nejdůležitější zákony a nařízení o národnostním školství pro zemi Moravskoslezskou*. Praha, SPN, 1938.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ J. Macura, *op. cit.*

³¹ J. Szymeczek, *Szkie dziejów Towarzystwa Nauczycieli Polskich W: Folwarczny Stanisław (ed.): Tu byliśmy, tu jesteśmy: Szkolnictwo polskie na Zaolziu w ostatniej dekadzie XX wieku*, Czeski Cieszyn, 2000, Towarzystwo Nauczycieli Polskich w Republice Czeskiej.

could not be introduced, schools were left as they were³². Polish schools were left in a highly unfavourable situation. Polish schools were mostly one-class, i.e. pupils of all eight grades were taught in one classroom, which was divided into 3–5 sections. After the fifth year, pupils could switch to a 3-year civic school, 8-year grammar school or 7-year “Realschulen”. All these schools were exclusively German, however. From this point of view, Polish children were discriminated against.

Germanisation was aided by the weak national awareness of people, who perceived German as the one which would provide better and wider options when looking for work, and therefore did not feel the need to learn in Polish³³. At the turn of the 19th century, representatives of the national revival stood against Germanisation and the degradation of Polish schools. The centre of national revival, which reinstated Polish as the language of instruction at schools, was the School Foundation, which had operated in Teschen Silesia since 1885 and the Polish Teaching Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Pedagogiczne)³⁴.

Thanks to the combined effort of these organisations, the representatives of the Polish national revival disrupted the German monopoly in education, and Polish secondary schools were built.

Conclusion

Germanisation in this region was not realised with the harsh restrictive measures that were used in those parts of today's Poland then under Prussian control. Owing to the greater freedom and autonomy, local teachers had more room for public enlightenment which supported the professional interests and development of local culture and language. These activities turned general school teachers of the 19th century, especially its second half, into important figures in the region, who pushed for political, cultural and economic changes in Teschen Silesian society.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the national movement in the region increased in power, together with the growing national awareness of the Polish population of Teschen Silesia. An important role in the national revival of the Polish people in the Teschen Silesia was played by young teachers, especially graduates of the teacher institution of Bobrk in Teschen (founded in 1904), who educated their pupils with patriotic feelings in mind.

³² J. Macura, *op. cit.*

³³ L. Brożek, *Wiek XIX. Oświata i życie kulturalne* In: Chlebowczyk Józef (ed.): *Cieszyn: zarys rozwoju miasta i powiatu*. Katowice, 1973, Wydawnictwo Śląsk; L. Brożek, *Szkolnictwo i oświata na Śląsku Cieszyńskim*. „Głos Ziemi Cieszyńskiej” 1975, no. 35, p. 4

³⁴ E. Buława, *Polskie szkolnictwo w międzywojennej Czechosłowacji*, jednodniówka Sekcji Historii Regionu ZG PZK W: Jaworski Kazimierz (ed.): *Szkolnictwo polskie na Zaolziu*. Opole 1995, Instytut Nauk Pedagogicznych Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, Opolska Oficyna Wydawnicza; J. Macura, *op. cit.*; E. Buława, *op. cit.*

The first successes of the national movement emerged already in 1907, when the languages used in Teschen Silesia were all considered equal. In this year, it was also discovered that Polish was used as the only official language in 25 villages and both languages – German and Polish – in eight villages³⁵.

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³⁵ J. Macura, *op. cit.*

- I. Panic, *Z dziejów szkolnictwa średniego w Księstwie Cieszyńskim w czasach nowożytnych (do 1773)*, Cieszyn 1995, Liceum im. A. Osuchowskiego w Cieszynie.
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