

## **Gesher Galicia Report on Stern Grant 2013**

Gesher Galicia's web presence currently consists of five separate websites, all hosted on standalone servers: the main informational website and Family Finder ([www.geshergalicia.org](http://www.geshergalicia.org)); the free searchable All Galicia Database ([search.geshergalicia.org](http://search.geshergalicia.org)); the Map Room ([maps.geshergalicia.org](http://maps.geshergalicia.org)); a password-protected server for members-only scanned and photographed file storage ([records.geshergalicia.org](http://records.geshergalicia.org)); and a new API server to allow integration of our data with other websites ([api.geshergalicia.org](http://api.geshergalicia.org)). At this time, only two of these sites have been scheduled for multilingual capabilities, the main website and the All Galicia Database.

The main website runs on a content management system called WordPress. It uses a plugin suite called WPML (WordPress MultiLingual) to manage different parts of the translation framework, such as content versions, menu synchronization, how to handle fallbacks if preferred languages are not available, how to translate "slugs" in URL's, etc. It has a more actively maintained codebase and product than competitor translation plugin systems like qTranslate.

The board of Gesher Galicia identified three primary languages that we wanted to concentrate on translating our content into, based on our geographical areas of interest and our user base: Polish, Ukrainian, and Hebrew. We decided to use Polish as our first language for translation, as it uses the Latin alphabet and would be an easier test case for our multilingual project. Using Hebrew as the first language was discussed, as we have so many members living in Israel, but configuring the website to work with right-to-left text is a much more labor-intensive process, as page layout items need to be designed to flow right-to-left too, not just the text snippets. So, Polish became our first "guinea pig" for the project.

One of the benefits of using WPML to work with multi-lingual database content is that it easily integrates with an online paid translation service called ICanLocalize. We were able to send our web content directly from the WordPress backend to the translation service and have it translated by native speakers, who could then send it back in a format already suitable for display on the website, automatically creating the appropriate database items without cutting and pasting or passing around e-mail documents. We were able to vet and choose our pool of translators on the ICanLocalize website beforehand to check their fluency and experience with this kind of writing, i.e. historical content rather than product manuals.

Over the past few months, the majority of the Gesher Galicia website has been translated, page by page, including the lengthy Projects descriptions, pages of information about Galicia and its history and districts, descriptions of the organization, as well as functional and navigational items such as menus (including dropdowns), and category names, page titles, metadata, etc. Not yet translated but coming in the next few weeks are some of the very short text blurbs on the home page and text in our footer and sidebar, as well as a Polish language version of our logo that will be swapped in when viewing the site in Polish. We discussed but decided not to translate the nearly one hundred online articles from our quarterly publication "The Galitzianer" into Polish to save funds, as these articles can be lengthy and would be expensive to translate. But if any of our article authors choose

to sponsor the cost of the translation of their own articles into another language (or perhaps provide a translation themselves), we would be able and happy to host the content.

The main website will still load in English as the default language almost all of the time, but will soon display a little flag in the top corner that enables quick switching between the English and Polish versions (and eventually other languages too). When content is not available in Polish, it will display the English version as a default or fallback. For people who may be coming to the website from an IP address that is in geo-referenced to Poland and/or people who have listed Polish as their first-choice preferred language in their web browser's "Accept-Language" user-agent string, they will see the Polish version of the website first as their default, and then be able to switch to English (or other languages) as they choose. The same functionality will be used for other languages as they come online, i.e. someone coming from a Ukrainian IP address or Ukrainian language user-agent string would first be directed to the Ukrainian version of the website.

This functionality means that our new Polish language web content will be full-text indexed by search engines, too, and we hope to have many new Polish-speaking researchers and potential members find us who might not have otherwise found our organization when all our content was just in English.

We are about to start beta testing the website with a native Polish speaker, someone who has worked with Gesher Galicia for some time on our record transcription projects. Depending on the number of issues we find with the site, we will be able to "switch on" Polish functionality for everyone using our main website within a month or so, by the fall of 2014. Turning on Polish functionality for the All Galicia Database will follow after that.

The AGD does not use WordPress, but rather is built in PHP. All of the text strings on the AGD already use PHP's gettext module, which means that they are localized with a locale-based ".po" or ".mo" file, not through a content management system like WordPress. Therefore, translations for that site will be done through ICanLocalize, but not through the WordPress backend. Additionally, much of the text snippets needed for the AGD have actually already translated into Hebrew (not Polish) and are ready for web display. This is thanks to the web development work that Brooke Schreier Ganz did for IGRA in 2012-2013 for their bilingual All Israel Database -- another Stern Grant winning project. (Brooke's work for IGRA's database was done with the agreement that any new code developed there would be open source and could be shared back to Gesher Galicia or any other group that might like to use it.)

Once Gesher Galicia's multi-lingual website has been vetted with Polish as our test case, we will be much more easily be able to move forward with adding other languages. As noted earlier, enabling Hebrew translations would mean some extra work, because of the right-to-left issues, but it is still high on the list. And we would even be able to add other languages like French or Spanish to try to reach out to researchers with Galician interests or roots who may live in places like France or Argentina, who may not be as connected to the broader English-speaking genealogical community.

We hope that Geshher Galicia's new online outreach to people who speak or read other languages will serve as a model for other primarily-English-speaking genealogical groups to follow.