

The rise of consciousness

The 19th century is the time when national consciousness began to appear among the simple inhabitants of Europe. Before then, the sense of national belonging constituted an exclusive phenomenon reserved for the nobility and aristocracy, whereas simple people were most concerned with those subordinates they were. The revolution brought by the Enlightenment near the end of the 18th century, the benefits of which, such as personal freedom, universal access to elementary education, and the idea of equality before the law, were spread across Europe through the conquests of Napoleon Bonaparte, contributed to the emergence of nations in the present understanding of this word. The simple people ceased to be a Polish-speaking element and started to become conscious of the consequences stemming from the fact that they spoke this particular language.

During this period, four national communities of different degrees of consciousness functioned in Upper Silesia. The most prominent national consciousness manifested among Jews, who, paradoxically, constituted the smallest group of Silesian inhabitants, and thus did not create separate Jewish districts like in Western Europe. Their national consciousness involved the cultivation of their national religion. The Jews who lost their faith quickly gave in to assimilation.

In many cases, the Germans who arrived in Silesia during two mass colonization actions in the 13th century and the second half of the 18th century, and who lived in tightly knit colonies in villages and towns, as well as in diaspora among the native population, preserved the memory about their origin, which also evoked a sense of national distinctiveness.

The rise of Polish national consciousness among the native population of Silesia implied the realization of some seemingly obvious facts: the observations such as "I am Catholic, the Germans go to the Protestant chapel, whereas my family and I attend the church," "at home, we speak in the Silesian dialect, which is understandable to a Pole, yet completely incomprehensible to a German," and, in the case of those more advanced in the discovery of their national consciousness, "I feel one with the Polish culture and the way of experiencing religiosity" were defined by the researchers as the three stages of the discovery of the Polishness by simple inhabitants of Upper Silesia, and therefore, of the Koźle Region.

The last relatively small group in the 19th century consisted of Bohemians, or rather the descendants of the emigrants from Bohemia, who already managed to assimilate more with Germans rather than Poles, but remained aware of their Bohemian roots. They most often lived in tightly knit colonies, and, after World War II, were forcefully resettled to Czechoslovakia.