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# Shared Spaces: Jews in Public Schools in Galicia

by Alicja Maślak-Maciejewska

## Abstract

Galicia was home to the largest Jewish population of the Cisleithanian part of the Habsburg Empire. After the Josephinian “German-Jewish schools” had closed already in 1806, educational patterns differed from those in Moravia and Bohemia, where Jewish children received a secular education in a more consistent “Jewish” space. In Galicia in the constitutional era (post-1867), however, with mandatory education enforced, public schools became a shared space in which Jews and (Catholic) Christians functioned together. In Galicia, most Jewish children received public education but usually constituted a religious minority in the student body. The article analyzes how the school space, calendar, and routines were adjusted to accommodate the multi-religious character of the student body.

## 1 Introduction

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, attending school became a common experience shared by children of different religions and cultures inhabiting the Habsburg Empire.<sup>1</sup> The school system initiated by reforms during the 1770s and supported by a developed administrative apparatus was a result of the empire’s demand for education, and served as a powerful political tool. As recent research brilliantly shows, it was in fact a “last-gasp offspring of serfdom.”<sup>2</sup> The constitutional era (1867–1918) brought a liberal school reform in 1869 with which a new chapter in the history of schooling began. The reforms divided school from church and modernized the former. In the case of some crownlands such as Galicia the liberal school reform instigated a slow

<sup>1</sup> This research was funded by the National Science Centre of Poland, Warsaw (2018/31/D/HS3/03604).

<sup>2</sup> Tomáš Cvrček, *Schooling under Control: The Origins of Public Education in Imperial Austria* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 280.

development of mass education, as only then tools for enforcing compulsory schooling were implemented.

Galicia, formerly part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was incorporated into the Habsburg Monarchy in 1772. From the imperial perspective, this was a rural, poor, and economically underdeveloped territory situated on the borderland. From the perspective of Jewish history, however, Galicia was a center of major importance. It was home to the largest Jewish population in the Cisleithanian (Austrian) half of the later Habsburg Empire. Galician Jews were customarily perceived as bound to tradition and less modernized than their Moravian or Bohemian counterparts in western Cisleithania. This picture also influenced the perception of Jewish education. The scholarly literature often mentions the Jewish avoidance of mandatory schooling due to their attachment to the cheder (Jewish elementary school). However, it rarely mentions the fact that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century most Jewish children received a secular elementary education. In 1900, approximately 69.5 percent of Jewish children of school age completed mandatory schooling, this percentage being close to the general average for Galician society.<sup>3</sup> More than 80 percent of Jewish schoolchildren went to non-denominational public schools along with students of other religions and backgrounds.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, these schools constituted a shared space where children of different religions met. Because of the universality of mandatory schooling, Galician schools, like Habsburg schools in general, constituted a space where similarity and difference, community and alterity come to the fore.<sup>5</sup> The question about the interplay between these categories seems crucial from both a Habsburg studies and Jewish studies perspective.

<sup>3</sup> My calculations are based on census and school data and refer to the reports of the Galician school council among others published annually in Polish as *Sprawozdanie Rady Szkolnej Krajowej o stanie wychowania publicznego* and in German as *Statistik der Allgemeinen Volksschulen und Bürgerschulen* for the years between 1890 and 1900 published in the "Oesterreichische Statistik." There are no exact figures about Jewish children recorded in 1900; I therefore calculated this figure based on the general average in Galicia (13.9 percent).

<sup>4</sup> According to the data from 1900 (the latest record), Jews were present in 2,807 out of 4,225 primary schools operating in Galicia at that time. Only in 65 of those schools the majority of students was Jewish, and only 18.94 percent of all Jewish schoolchildren in Galicia attended these Jewish-majority schools. See K.K. Statistischen Central-Commission, ed., *Schematismus der Allgemeinen Volksschulen und Bürgerschulen in den im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreichen und Ländern auf Grund der statistischen Aufnahme vom 15. Mai 1900* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1902). I am grateful to T. Cvrček for providing me with a copy of this source.

<sup>5</sup> See the introduction to this volume of PaRDeS.

While the multicultural character of Galician schools is usually noted by historians, at least in passing, previous studies have rarely reached deeper to the level of relations in schools or analyzed schools as a contact zone in which cultural transfers occurred.<sup>6</sup> A particular lacuna concerns research questions posed within the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*) and to an extent inspired by the spatial turn in the humanities. These pertain to the functioning of various religious groups in a physical school space and analysis of the day-to-day school reality.

This article employs such a perspective, analyzing how the school space was adjusted to the multireligious character of the student body. Was school a common space, symbolically owned by all the students, or were Christian students privileged? I will answer these questions by analyzing the situation in Galicia, the crownland with the largest Jewish population in Cisleithania. Jews also constituted the largest religious minority in Galicia. Therefore, their experiences might have been characteristic of other religious minorities living under Habsburg rule. The article focuses on the period of the post-liberal school reforms that were implemented in Galicia between 1869 and 1873, and created a new school reality.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Education of Jews in the Habsburg Empire

The educational patterns among Jews differed between the Habsburg crownlands. In some lands, the educational situation in the constitutional era (1867–1918) was conditioned by the former success or lack thereof of Josephinian German-Jewish schools, which were opened at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In Galicia, however, these schools were already closed in 1806.<sup>8</sup> In Moravia and Bohemia, by contrast, they flourished throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, providing local Jewish children with a secular elementary education in a “Jewish

<sup>6</sup> Two exceptions are Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, *Pogranicze polsko-żydowskie: Topografie i teksty* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2013), 47–76; Rachel Manekin, *The Rebellion of the Daughters: Jewish Women Runaways in Habsburg Galicia* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> The remarks presented below summarize readings of multiple sources: the limited word count of this article does not allow for lengthy footnotes, therefore only examples are given. The reader will find further detail in my forthcoming book, which will be published in 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Dirk Sadowski, *Haskala und Lebenswelt: Herz Homberg und die jüdischen deutschen Schulen in Galizien 1782–1806* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

space.”<sup>9</sup> In Bohemia, German-Jewish schools only started to close in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to migration and the rising “Czech-Jewish” movement, which led to a growing presence of Jewish children in public schools. In turn, Moravian German-Jewish schools continued to operate and play an important role until the collapse of the Habsburg Empire.

Before the constitutional era, the majority of Jewish children did not receive a secular education on the primary level in Galicia. Those who did, acquired it in secular (non-cheder) Jewish schools. However, there were only few such institutions, for example six in 1865 with altogether 2,651 students.<sup>10</sup> Some Jewish children frequented Christian denominational elementary schools, but exact figures are unknown. Significant growth in school attendance occurred only from the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In 1900, 78,466 Jewish children received mandatory elementary education.<sup>11</sup> Jewish girls were sent to school more often than boys. In the years from 1871 to 1900, they constituted between 58.5 and 65.9 percent of Jewish schoolchildren in public schools.<sup>12</sup>

In the constitutional era, the obligation of mandatory schooling could be fulfilled either in public or in private elementary schools. Jews used this possibility to establish their own schools, for example those founded by the Baron Hirsch Foundation. However, most Jewish children were sent to public non-Jewish schools. Many of these children, especially boys, simultaneously attended cheders.<sup>13</sup> Some Jewish children were sent exclusively to cheders and therefore did not fulfill the school obligation. It must be stressed, however, that the avoidance of compulsory education occurred among various social groups and was not typical of Jews.<sup>14</sup> The reasons for this avoidance varied, including poverty, child labor, and ideological opposition to school.

<sup>9</sup> Marsha L. Rozenblit, “Creating Jewish Space: German-Jewish Schools in Moravia,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 44 (2013): 108–147, here 109–112; Hillel J. Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 54–55.

<sup>10</sup> *Detail-Conscription der Volksschulen in den im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreichen und Ländern nach dem Stande vom Ende des Schuljahres 1865* (Vienna: M. Salzer, 1870), 934.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob Thon, *Die Juden in Oesterreich* (Berlin/Halensee: Louis Lamm, 1908), 88.

<sup>12</sup> These calculations are based on school statistics, see footnote 3.

<sup>13</sup> This is attested in many memoirs, for example, Leopold Infeld, *Szkice z przeszłości. Wspomnienia* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1961), 9.

<sup>14</sup> See for example: *Sprawozdanie c.k. Rady szkolnej krajowej o stanie wychowania publicznego w roku szkolnym 1877/78* (Lviv: Drukarnia Narodowa, 1879), 32–33.

Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century also the number of Jews frequenting secondary schools, i.e. Gymnasias and *Realschulen*, grew in Galicia as well as in other crownlands.<sup>15</sup> Typically, the percentage of Jews among the student body was higher than their percentage in general society: for example in 1900, Jews constituted more than 11 percent of Galician society and around 20 percent of secondary school students. One must remember, however, that in absolute numbers the secondary school students did not constitute a large group. For instance, in 1900/01, 13,351 Jews in total frequented secondary schools throughout the whole Habsburg Empire.<sup>16</sup>

### 3 Public Schools as a Shared Space

Galician schools, both primary and secondary, became an arena of contact between Jewish and non-Jewish students. They constituted a shared space in which children of different faiths met regularly. This facilitated interactions that, due to their recurrent character, shaped the daily lives of the schoolchildren.

After the liberal school reforms, Galician schools were made institutionally independent from the church, yet they retained a Christian character until the collapse of the empire and thereafter. While according to the letter of the law children of different denominations could have frequented public schools on equal terms, the schools were in practice ruled by the religious majority and adjusted to its needs. There were two main denominations in Galicia: Roman Catholics (mainly Poles, 46.49 percent of the Galician population in 1910) and Greek Catholics (mainly Ruthenians/Ukrainians, 42.13 percent of the population in 1910). Roman Catholics dominated in Western Galicia while Greek Catholics were the majority in Eastern Galicia. Jews constituted the third major religious group at 10.86 percent of the Galician population in 1910.<sup>17</sup>

The school space was permeated with Christian symbols like crosses and pictures of saints hanging on the walls. Christian motifs were also featured in

<sup>15</sup> Gary B. Cohen, *Education and Middle-Class Society in Imperial Austria 1848–1918* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press), 145.

<sup>16</sup> Thon, *Die Juden in Österreich*, 97.

<sup>17</sup> Krzysztof Zamorski, *Informator statystyczny do dziejów społeczno-gospodarczych Galicji* (Kra-kow/Warsaw: Polskie Towarzystwo Statystyczne 1989), 71.

the textbooks used by all children.<sup>18</sup> In many cases, clergy played an important role at the schools. They worked as catechists, but their opinions mattered in other issues as well. Jews rarely worked as teachers of secular subjects, although, according to the law, they could have studied in teachers' seminaries and worked in this profession. Yet, antisemitic grassroots actions of local school authorities and seminary boards made this career path unfeasible. The criticism of the idea of Jews teaching Christian children came mainly from Roman Catholic religious circles, which were influential in Galicia. As a result, the number of Jews in the teaching profession was significantly lower than their percentage among students in primary schools. Jewish teachers in public schools constituted only 0.74 percent in 1890 and 1.42 percent in 1900.<sup>19</sup> This disproportion was a thorny issue for Jews, who especially criticized situations in which a school employed only Christians, although Jews constituted the majority of the student body.<sup>20</sup>

The basic school curriculum followed in daily instruction, as well as extra-curricular activities such as study trips, were open to all students regardless of religion. The curriculum shaped common experience, although Christians surely felt more at home with the program. Sources rarely recount certain adjustments made for the Jewish students, such as dividing the group in two during an excursion and allowing Jews to visit synagogues instead of churches.<sup>21</sup> The experience of the children is moreover not translatable into quantitative categories, because daily practices and customs varied between schools. For instance, the seating of students, which might have had either a dividing or a unifying effect, was not regulated by law, but left to the teachers. Some chose to seat the students alphabetically,<sup>22</sup> others according to height,<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> This was typical of all primers, which were widely used (having multiple editions) in Galicia, for example: *Elementarz dla szkół ludowych* (ten editions, the first published in 1878). The presence of Christian symbols in the school space is attested in multiple memoirs as well as lists of furniture preserved in the school archives.

<sup>19</sup> Thon, *Die Juden in Österreich*, 89.

<sup>20</sup> See for example: "Dola nauczycieli żydowskich," *Wschód*, 5–39 (1904): 4; "Stosunki w szkolnictwie ludowym we Lwowie," *Jedność* 1 (1911): 6.

<sup>21</sup> "Chrzanów," *Tygodnik Chrzanowski*, 3–27 (1909): 5.

<sup>22</sup> Bolesław Drobner, *Bezustanna walka: Wspomnienia 1883–1918* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1962), vol. 1, 69.

<sup>23</sup> Stanisław Giza, *Na ekranie życia: wspomnienia z lat 1908–1939* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1973), 76.



and then again others according to religion.<sup>24</sup> The latter method inevitably fortified divisions and, in some cases, contributed to the maltreatment of Jewish students by their peers.<sup>25</sup>

Another area of division was the language of instruction. Both Polish and Ukrainian were used in Galician schools, depending on the majority denomination among the students. However, Polish and Ukrainian were usually foreign languages for many Jewish children whose mother tongue was Yiddish. In practice, this meant that they could not participate fully in the lessons, at least initially. Such experiences simultaneously had an immense linguistically acculturating effect, contributing to the growing fluency of Galician Jewry in the Polish language.<sup>26</sup> Naturally, the situation was different in secondary schools, where students always had a previous command of the language of instruction. Still, the mistakes they made such as incorrect pronunciation or minor syntax and vocabulary lapses, although these presumably did not hinder the students' ability to understand the lessons, led to mockery.<sup>27</sup>

Religious calendars also differed and the school year in Galician schools was attuned to the calendar of either the Greek or Roman Catholic majority of the student body. Their festivals were days off at school. In those public schools in which Jews dominated, both Jewish and Christian holidays were rest days. In most public schools and in all secondary schools, classes generally continued to be held during Jewish holidays. Moreover, Saturdays were regular school days. Customarily, Jews did not frequent schools on their holidays. In order to facilitate this, headmasters received lists of such festivals.<sup>28</sup> On Shabbat, Jewish students were mostly exempted from writing. In some secondary schools, however, receiving such an exemption was not customary and required effort and civil courage.<sup>29</sup> It also happened that teachers treated

<sup>24</sup> See for example: "W tutejszej szkole żeńskiej," *Postęp*, 1–10 (1895): 7.

<sup>25</sup> Jechiel, "Nowy Sącz," *Moriah*, (no issue number) (1909): 268.

<sup>26</sup> Most Jews, who were predominantly from urban areas, went to school where the language of instruction was Polish. Ukrainian-language schools operated mainly in villages.

<sup>27</sup> See for example: Wawrzyniec Dayczak, "Gimnazjum w Brodach na przełomie XIX i XX wieku we wspomnieniach byłego ucznia," ed. Maria Dayczak-Domanasiewicz, *Krakowskie Pismo Kresowe* 4 (2012): 29.

<sup>28</sup> See for example: National Archive in Przemyśl, The Elementary School in Krosno, 56/274/0/1/2, 83.

<sup>29</sup> See for example: Soma Morgenstern, *In einer anderen Zeit: Jugendjahre in Ostgalizien* (Lüneburg: Klampen Verlag, 1995), 210, 216.

Jewish students unfavorably, questioning them about the given material the next day after holidays.<sup>30</sup> This was interpreted by Jews as a manifestation of antisemitism.

#### 4 Religion and Religious Instruction at Galician Schools

What divided students most, however, was the sphere of religious life, which at that time was closely intertwined with school life. All-important school events such as the beginning and end of the school year had a religious setting, and students were obliged to participate in religious practices such as confession and holy mass. Usually, a local Christian church and school closely collaborated in organizing these events. In some cases, Jews participated in these activities despite their thoroughly Christian character. As a schoolboy, Soma Morgenstern (1890–1976), a later writer and journalist, even sang for a bishop during his visit at school, his Jewishness not being an obstacle.<sup>31</sup>

The religious divisions in daily school life were most pronounced during weekly religion classes. Religion was an important school subject in Galician schools, listed first in school transcripts. Children of all denominations were supposed to receive such lessons either held exclusively for them or jointly for students of several classes and schools, depending on their numbers. The responsibility for supervising and organizing such lessons rested with the churches and religious institutions.<sup>32</sup> For Jewish communities, this was a new and not an easy task. As a result, the chronology of introducing the so-called “Mosaic religion” to Galician schools was complex. In some schools, these lessons were instituted already in the mid-1870s, in others much later. In general, lessons on this subject were present until World War One in most schools with a significant number of Jewish students. A few hundred Jewish religion teachers worked in Galicia, in many cases being the only Jewish teachers in a given school.<sup>33</sup>

The organization of religion lessons reveals deep inequalities. In many cases, lessons for Christian and Jewish students were not organized simultaneously.

<sup>30</sup> “Brzeżany,” *Moriah* [9] (1906): 325.

<sup>31</sup> Morgenstern, *In einer anderen Zeit*, 83–84.

<sup>32</sup> This partially changed in 1889, when a new law pertaining to religion teachers was issued. Since then, the responsibility was shared with the school authorities.

<sup>33</sup> As evidenced by lists of school staff included in Galician lists of officials (schematisms). A biographical dictionary of all Jewish religion teachers is currently being prepared.

For example, Christian catechesis was held during regular school hours, but lessons in Judaism in the afternoon, which required coming to school twice. Moreover, this caused gaps in the daily schedule, during which students needed to find a place to stay. Not every school allowed students to stay in the building, even in winter. Cases when desperate Jewish parents asked priests to allow their children to attend catechesis only to avoid the winter cold were frequent enough to draw the attention of the Jewish press.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, lessons for Jews were sometimes organized in spaces not suited for this purpose, such as a corridor. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, there were also schools that had a separate classroom dedicated to religious instruction for children of different faiths.

Receiving instruction in their own religion symbolically confirmed the students' legitimate position in the school. Such lessons consequently contributed to making Jews feel at home in Galician schools. Other practices that similarly contributed to a sense of Jewish belonging included the festive beginning of a school year in a synagogue or regular weekly sermons, similar to the ones organized for Christians<sup>35</sup>. Moreover, the very presence of a Jewish religion teacher at school was important: The teacher offered Jewish students support and cared for their religious needs.

## 5 Conclusion

This subject shows the benefits of employing both Jewish and Habsburg studies perspectives. The former allows for a deeper understanding of the complexity, including the religious dimension, of school life (and how this was experienced by Jews), while the latter allows this to be placed within a broader context and thus discerns between universal and particular experiences. The Habsburg Empire had a multicultural and multireligious character. The school space shows what this meant in daily life.

As I have shown in this article, public schools in Galicia constituted a shared space where children of different religions learned together. Therefore, school was an arena where differences were performed and where various

<sup>34</sup> Józef Sarmacki, "W sprawie nauczycieli i nauki religii mojżeszowej," *Przyszłość* 4–11/12 (1896): 87.

<sup>35</sup> Such sermons were called "exhortations." See: Alicja Maślak-Maciejewska, ed., *Kazania dla młodzieży żydowskiej w Galicji* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2021).

and sometimes opposing social powers intersected. The question about what school should be, including how open it should be to various religions, was a political one. The crownlands differed greatly in how Jews received their primary secular education; more similarities existed on the secondary level.

Yet, many of the problems described in this article for the province of Galicia were universal. The same questions might be applied not only to Jews from other crownlands, but also to other religious or “national” minorities in the Habsburg Empire. Future comparative studies would probably be able to answer questions about how schools dealt with multireligious and multicultural student bodies and whether the situation of various minorities, however defined, differed.

