



Endangered languages in Wilamowice

Wilamowice, a small town in southern Poland, will host guests from all over the world indigenous Mexicans, the people of Norman island Guernsey, Manx people, Lemkos from Ukraine, Polish Kashubians, and researchers from Poland, Great Britain, and the Netherlands – all because of Wilamowicean language, one of the most endangered languages in the world.

From the 18th to the 28th of September, Wilamowice will become a world research centre of endangered languages. In this little town near Bielsko-Biała, scientists, experts, activists, and invited representatives of ethnic and linguistic minorities will participate in seminars and workshops on revitalization of endangered languages. One of the goals of this event is developing a Wilamowicean language textbook for youth and adults. Guests, alongside the local community, will also be working on the idea of museum in Wilamowice.

„For several years, Wilamowice has been a "laboratory of language revitalization", involving the community and people from outside, including researchers, trying to rescue the endangered language together. Results of these activities might be helpful for other communities struggling to preserve their language”, explains Bartłomiej Chromik, ethnologist specializing on the topic of Wilamowice at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw.

This meeting is a part of a long-term project of revitalization endangered languages, including Wilamowicean. Essential for these actions was acquisition of prestigious European grant (Twinning) in the Horizon 2020 program. The grant was awarded to the scientific consortium under the direction of the Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw. The coordinator of the project is Justyna Olko, who has ample research experience in endangered languages revitalization.

The results of this project will be a textbook for planning and conducting language and culture revitalization projects, documentary films and other multimedia related to endangered languages, curricula of minority languages, and learning materials for activists and researchers working on endangered languages revitalization.

There will be guests from Mexico, Guernsey island, people from Isle of Man, Scandinavian Saami, Buryats from Russia, Basques, Scots, Gorals from Spiš, Carpathian Germans, and minorities from Poland: Kashubians, Lemkos, Silesians, Hutsuli and Poleshuks. They will share their experience and discuss solving problems and challenges they meet.

"We assume, that minorities fighting for their language rights should work together to achieve common goal. That is why we invited so many representatives of these groups", said Justyna Olko.

“We are working closely with them. We are acting according to the principle: nothing about linguistic minorities without them. In Wilamowice, we as researchers will conduct research in partnership with representatives of minority groups. The results will be presented on 25th of September to the local the community”, said Bartłomiej Chromik. He also said: “The participation of the users of endangered languages is an exception in this kind of project.”

Moreover, on 25th of September, at 3.30 pm, local activists will present a play based on the work by Florian Biesik, a poet from Wilamowice, „Óf jer welt" ("The next world"). Biesik, inspired by Dante's "Divine comedy", in 1921 moved Paradise, Purgatory and Hell to Wilamowice. It will be third play (after "The Little Prince" and "The Hobbit") staged fully in Wymysorys.

The field school will run from the 18th to the 28th of September. There is a free entrance to the play and all lectures.

Wilamowice:

Wilamowice (near Bielsko-Biała) was founded by settlers from Western Europe. This is the only town in Poland with its own language - Wilamowicean (*Wymysiöeryś*). Its structure resembles Luxembourgish, Yiddish, medieval Germanic varieties, with some influence from Slavic languages, which is a signs of centuries-long contact with neighbors. This language was formed in the 13th century and, until 1945, was a common means of communication in Wilamowice. But today only around 30 people (of the 3,000 living there) speak it as a first language. Approximately 60 can use it, and around 400 are able to understand Wilamowicean. It was included by UNESCO on the list of endangered languages as *severely endangered*.

Check what your name is in Wilamowicean: <http://dajnomawilamowice.pl/>

About the project:

"Engaged humanities in Europe: Capacity building for participatory research in linguistic-cultural heritage" is a project implemented under the Twinning Horizon 2020 program. Participants are scientists from three academic centres, University of Warsaw, University of Leiden, School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and representatives of ethnic minorities, users of regional, local and minority languages. One of the project's goals is the revitalization of the Wilamowicean language. For three years (2016-2018), researchers and activists will exchange experience and build strategies for effective revitalization of endangered languages. They will arrange workshops, four editions of summer school and research trips to London, Wilamowice, Leiden, and Mexico. They will also organize the European week of linguistic and cultural diversity, planned for November 2017 in Warsaw.

Visit the website of the project: <http://engagedhumanities.al.uw.edu.pl/>



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