

# Moikrewni.pl—A Review of a Polish Genealogical Web Site with Surname Mapping

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Genealogical Web sites designed for Poles are becoming fashionable these days, because of an emerging interest in family history in Poland. One recently developed site catering to Polish citizens and allowing them to create family trees online is [www.moikrewni.pl](http://www.moikrewni.pl) (Figure 1). This site, written in Polish, has a unique feature that may also benefit Polish-American genealogists: its surname mapping.

The very existence of this site is an interesting development because, for the longest time, Polish citizens were very private and did not like providing any personal information online. Sites that do give such information are protected, and you need to register to build your tree. There are, however, typically some features that are available to all without registering.

In Polish, *moi krewni* (pronounced *mo'-yee krev'-nee*) means “my relatives.” The site’s title, therefore, uses appropriate Polish words to describe its theme.

Worth noting, however, is the fact that this site is just one of a family of genealogical Web sites created by OSN Online Social Networking GmbH, based in Hamburg, Germany. Similar sites were designed for other languages, including English, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Brazilian Portuguese. The English version, <http://www.itsourtree.com/>, is very similar to the other Web sites, but there are slight differences between the various language versions.

Moikrewni uses the basic “let’s build a family tree” idea as its starting point. Additionally, it provides a forum, contact information, and a section regarding the company’s policies. As I said, though, the feature most valuable for Polish-Americans is the “Mapa nazwisk” or “surname map” at <http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/>. Mapping of surnames in current-day Poland can potentially be a useful tool to locate lost relatives in the old country. It is especially useful for uncommon surnames.

Remember, however, that the site is geared toward the Polish speaker, and a name you type into the “Mapa nazwisk” box could be only partially correct. The Polish

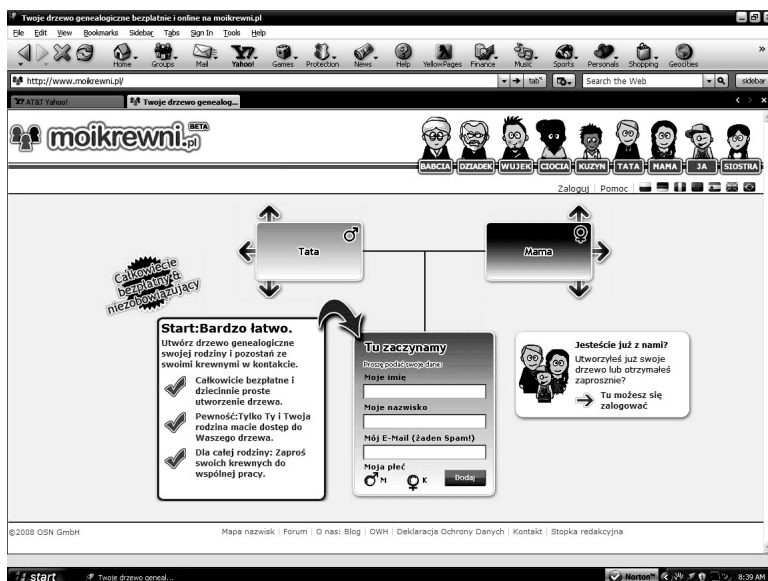


Figure 1. Home page of [www.moikrewni.pl](http://www.moikrewni.pl) (all screen captures used with permission of the Moikrewni webmaster).

diacritical marks are very important on this site, and the database may contain numerous, slightly different variants of surnames with diacritical marks. For instance, if you type in *Sliwinski* in English and click on the button that says “Szukaj” (Search), you will get a map for *Sliwinkis* in Poland; but this map will be misleading and incomplete.

In Polish the standard spelling of this name is *Śliwiński*, with acute accents over the *s* and *n*. Variant spellings of the name include *Śliwinski* and *Sliwiński*. To illustrate, a search for *Sliwinski* tells you that as of 2002 there were nine Polish citizens who were listed under that name in the database of PESEL (a Polish government agency) from which these figures were compiled. There were 31 entries for *Śliwinski* and 119 for *Sliwiński*. A search for *Śliwiński*, on the other hand, shows you there were 8,955 Poles who spelled it that way. The diacritical marks make a difference!

What’s more, Poles use feminine forms of many surnames, including those typically ending in *-ski*, *-cki*, *-zki*, and *-ny*. The standard feminine form is *Śliwińska*, and 9,570 Polish citizens went by that form as of 2002—not something you’d want to overlook. The variants *Sliwinska*, *Śliwinska*, and *Sliwińska*, though not technically correct by Polish spelling rules, should not be

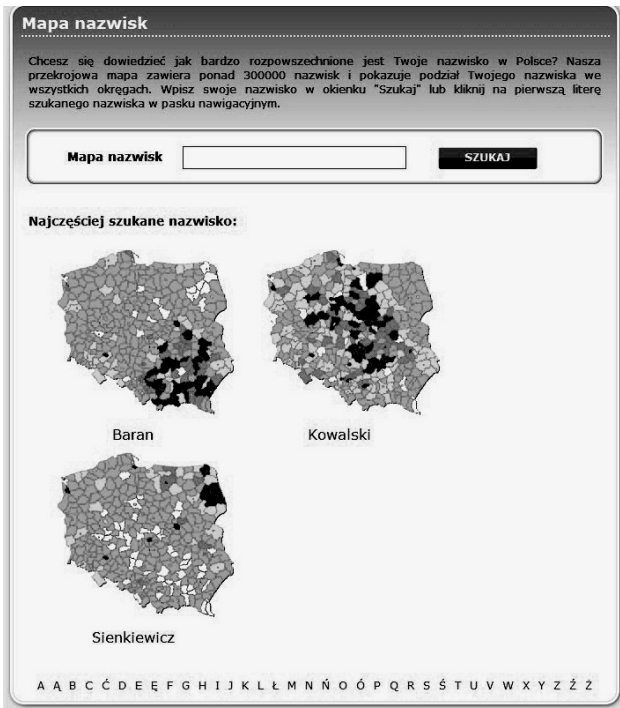


Figure 2. "Mapa nazwisk" page with Polish alphabet.

ignored, either. It just might be that *your* relatives, for some reason, are among those listed under one of those variants.

So to achieve a full understanding of a specific surname in Poland, you really need to review all maps associated with all variants of that surname. There are also hyphenated surname combinations to be reckoned with; a study of *Śliwiński*, for instance, should also include *Sliwinski-König*.

Although the diacritical marks present a challenge, there is a convenient alpha-



Figure 3. Searching for surnames.

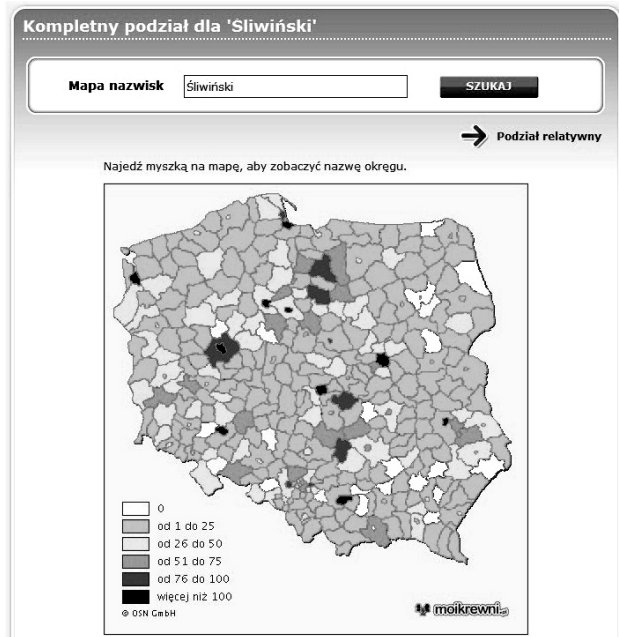


Figure 4. Map of the surname *Śliwiński* showing its wide distribution in Poland.

betic aid located at the bottom of the "Mapa nazwisk" page (Figure 2). All possible first letters of surnames are represented, and clicking on any letter lets you start searching for names beginning with that letter. It sounds straightforward, but it can take a little longer to find your particular surname when searching a list from one spelling to another, and yours might be in between (Figure 3). Plan on searching several times at different locations. You may need to page patiently through successive lists, narrowing the possibilities down as you go, until you get the exact form you want.

If the name you want doesn't include any diacritical marks, you can go straight to the page with your name by inputting the URL <http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/XXX.html>, substituting your name (no capital letters) for the XXX. Thus <http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/kowalski.html> takes you straight to the map for *Kowalski*, and <http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/kowalska.html> to the map for *Kowalska*. This does not work, however, if names include diacritical marks. Thus <http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/śliwiński.html> will not work. Those Polish characters must be coded a specific way: <http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/%25C5%259Bliwi%25C5%2584ski.html>.

The name *Śliwiński* is very widely distributed, and high concentrations are associated with big cities (Figure 4). Although this is interesting, it does not point to a

specific region in Poland and thus provides no starting point for researching the surname. I've established that there are a number of unrelated families who bear this name. Therefore, old-fashioned document searches offer a better chance of finding an ancestral village for my family.

Some surnames, such as *Czopor* (from my mother's side), have no separate feminine form and no diacritical marks, and therefore there is only one map for that surname (Figure 5). Since *Czopor* is an uncommon name, this map has proven to be very useful. This surname shows high concentrations in southeastern Poland.

The data from the "Mapa nazwisk" search engine is comparable to the data from the searchable database at <http://www.herby.com.pl/indexslo.html>, which some call the "Rymut site," after Kazimierz Rymut, the Polish professor who first compiled and published the data. Both sets of figures came from the Polish government agency called PESEL, and both show the frequency and distribution of surnames borne by Polish citizens—the Rymut site with data from 1990, Moikrewni with data from 2002. For some time it has been possible to create surname maps by taking data from the Rymut site and plugging it into the applet at <http://www.genpol.com/Mapa+main.html>. But that mapping program is not as sharp and easy to use as Moikrewni's.

It's interesting that Moikrewni shows 1,710 more Śliwińskis than the Rymut site does. [Editor—Rymut said the 1990 data lacked figures for about 7% of the Polish population, so the more accurate 2002 data will often show larger numbers.] The Rymut site combines the figures for the masculine and feminine forms, whereas Moikrewni gives separate maps and pages for each form, and the total is up to you to calculate.

The Rymut site breaks data down by the 49 provinces of 1990, whereas Moikrewni's numbers are broken down by current counties or *powiaty*, not the 16 current provinces. The greater detail of Moikrewni's data, and the ability to place your mouse over a location on the map and see a county or city name pop up, are particularly valuable to anyone not too familiar with Poland.

Genealogists looking for all variants and all data during searches may wish to consult Rymut's *Dictionary of Surnames in Current Use in Poland at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, a CD published in

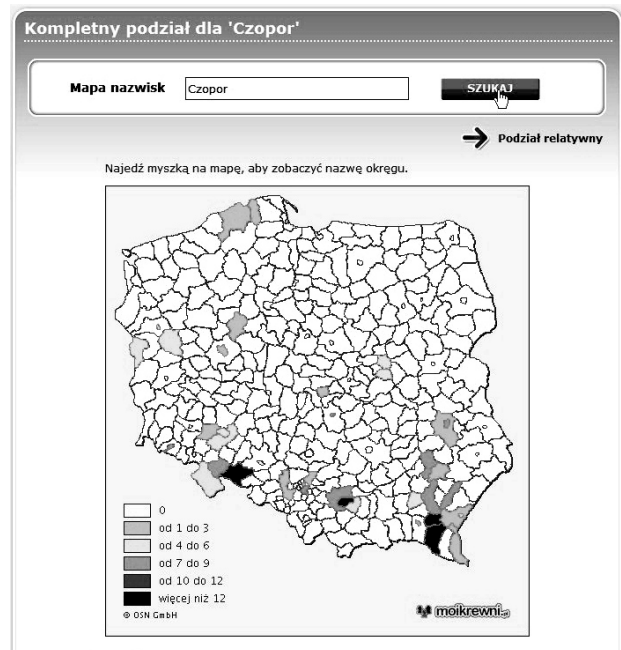


Figure 5. Map of *Czopor* surname showing its comparatively limited distribution in Poland.

2002 by the Polish Genealogical Society of America (formerly sold by the Society, but now out of print). That CD gives complete breakdowns of PESEL's 2002 data for every county in which a surname appears, whereas Moikrewni lists data only for the 10 counties in which a name is most common. Moikrewni's maps, however, illustrate data for all counties, not just the "top 10."

Moikrewni also allows you to incorporate the surname maps it generates into your blog or family Web site. Naturally, the map includes the Moikrewni logo as a reminder of where it came from.

The forum portion of the Web site is helpful for those with very good Polish writing skills. Fortunately, as mentioned earlier, there is an English-language version of the Web site, <http://www.itsourtree.com>, and it provides contact information that will respond to questions in English. The folks there were very helpful with my inquiries. The English site does not have a surname mapping feature, but you can access the Moikrewni site by clicking on the Polish flag near the top right of the home page.

Polish-language family tree Web sites are aimed at the growing number of Poles interested in genealogy. These sites attract new clients by offering different free amenities that make the experience potentially more fruitful. With a little bit of assistance, Polish-Americans can also use these free amenities to benefit their research. 🌻