

Traces of Jewish life in Opatow, Poland

On 19th – 25th April 2015 the students and teachers from partnership schools from Poland, Germany, Romania, Portugal and Greece, participating in the international project ERASMUS+ “Local Traces of Jewish Life in Europe” met in Bartosz Głowacki High School in Opatów.

19/4

The programme of the stay in Poland began with the meeting of all delegations in Warsaw on 19th April – the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943. On this day the volunteers from the POLIN museum gifted pedestrians with paper daffodils – the symbols of the remembrance about the heroes of the uprising. During a short walk, the participants could see the Old Town, King Sigismund’s Column and the Royal Castle where they took some photos. The main aim of the stay in Warsaw was visiting the Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN, which took on the patronage of the project. Thanks to modern exhibitions and reproduced realities, the visitors were able to experience a journey from the time of the first Jews’ arrival in Poland to the Holocaust and post-war times.

Passing through eight consecutive galleries stretching on an area of 4000 square metres, the students and teachers made a time travel from the Middle Ages until the present - 1000 years of Polish Jewish history. The scene in the “Town” gallery was the most popular among the visitors. The centre of the Shtetl (small town with large Jewish population) was a delightful reconstruction of the painted vault from the wooden synagogue from Gwoździec and located below bimah – a kind of an elevated platform from which parts of the Tora are read. And all around life is pulsating: a marketplace, a shop, a school, a tavern and a house. The Jewish world in Poland of the interwar period in the 1920s is presented in the gallery “At the Jewish street”. From this multimedia street, students could enter the gates of tenement houses, where they were discovering the wide cultural and political life of this period: they browsed through the press of that time, danced tango to the sounds of vinyl discs, visited an artistic gallery. The gallery “Extinction” shows the reality of the life in the ghetto, mass slaughters in the East, deportation and death in the extermination camps. The time journey finishes with the gallery “Afterwar”, in which students were familiarised with the March events of 1968. The concept of the POLIN museum, the surrounding consisting of the historic items, paintings, reconstructions, interactive installations and the recent multimedia solutions made visiting the exhibition an important and impressive event. An extremely nice surprise was the meeting with Mrs Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the programme director of the permanent exposition in POLIN museum, the daughter of Mayer Kirshenblatt - the key figure of realizing the project in Opatów. In spite of many duties connected with the commemoration of the Ghetto Uprising as well as the anniversary of the Monument of the Ghetto Heroes, Mrs Kirshenblatt-Gimblett met with the students and teachers to have a short conversation and a photo taken.



Pedestrians with paper daffodils - symbols of the heroes of the uprising.



Monument of the Ghetto-Heroes



Exhibition



Jewish street



1000 years of Jewish history - The POLIN museum

20/4

On Monday, 20th April, the participants of the project visited Bartosz Głowacki High School in Opatów. In the lecture hall, the Principle Barbara Kasińska welcomed the guests and discussed the system of education in Poland. Moreover, she presented the history of Bartosz Głowacki High School and students’ educational successes. Next, the guests visited the school building: classrooms, the sports hall, the library and the school museum. Then the teachers went to the District Office, where the Head of the District characterized the region and the Świętokrzyskie Province. The visitors could find out about interesting facts concerning history, culture and geography of the Opatów Lands.

At the same time the students took part in an artistic-integrative workshop, which took place in the lecture hall and the reading room. It began with a short presentation of the school and a few songs prepared by Polish students. Next, the school theatre presented a short scene from the play “Romeo and Juliet”. The joyful plays and integrative games finished with a Belgian dance. In the afternoon both the teachers and the students walked around the town visiting the Market Square, the Town Hall, St Martin’s Collegiate and the greatest attractions of the town – the Warsaw Gate and the Underground Alley.



Visiting the school in Opatow