

School of Dialogue



School of Dialogue is an educational program, developed and conducted by the **Forum for Dialogue Among Nations**, which aims at broadening young people's knowledge about the long presence of Jews in Poland through self-exploration and commemoration of the pre-war Jewish history in the place they live. Activities are targeted at Polish middle school and high school students. Students participating in the project get to know the history of their town, often discovering blank spots on the map of knowledge of the no longer existing Jewish community.



Dear Friends,

The report in front of you documents the development of the **SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE** project, the most important educational program conducted by **FORUM FOR DIALOGUE AMONG NATIONS**.

In the 2011/2012 school year, the **SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE** program had 42 different participant schools in 35 locations around Poland. In all these towns, middle and high school students attended series of workshops led by Forum educators. The students did not only learn about their local Jewish history, but were able to share this knowledge with other residents of their towns. Together they designed an educational project addressed to their peers, school staff, and the local community. This possibility to both share and present their knowledge as part of the **SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE** inspired in these students a sense of responsibility for the commemoration of Jewish communities and their contribution to the local heritage.

The Forum aims to not only teach history, but also to foster dialogue and reconciliation between Poles and Jews. This year, the project enabled meetings between students and descendants of the local Jewish residents. It has been a great joy for us to see how much these meetings meant to their participants; often serving as a starting point for Polish-Jewish dialogue on the local level.

The **SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE** owes its success to various institutions, foundations and individuals, both in Poland and abroad, that support our educational efforts. This year, a grant from the US Department of State was of particular importance to us, as it enabled us to partner with leading educational institutions from the United States. With this report we hope to thank all our friends and well-wishers for their continuous support.

Sincerely,

ANDRZEJ FOLWARCZNY

President

Forum for Dialogue Among Nations

School of Dialogue

The SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE is an educational program created and implemented by FORUM FOR DIALOGUE AMONG NATIONS since 2008. From 2011 on, the program has been carried out under honorary patronage of the Polish Ministry of Education – a fact that testifies to the country-wide impact and importance of the issue addressed. Students' accomplishments are documented by local and international media, which additionally broadens this impact. What is more, in early 2012, thanks to the support of the US Department of State we have established working relationships with representatives of key American organizations focusing on Jewish culture and Holocaust education. These connections have enabled new possibilities for further growth of FORUM'S SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE project and the organization itself.

In the course of the past year, the reach of the project has expanded, while the interest on the part of schools and teachers continues. At the same time, FORUM strives to be present in places where Jewish history is gradually being forgotten. Time and again, we are told by students that during our program they constantly learn new things about places they thought they knew so well.

This positive change is gained in the course of four workshops conducted by trained FORUM educators, during which students discover their towns' Jewish history in a hands-on educational experience. Most of them confess later that owing to the project their perspective on their hometown has changed; the streets they walk may be the same, yet the context in which they see those streets is markedly different.





The SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE has given over one thousand Polish middle and high school students the opportunity to make independent discoveries, uncover hitherto-unknown history, and experience poignant moments. At the same time, it gave them a sense of responsibility for preserving the memory about Polish Jews. The participants often admit that the workshops have changed their opinions regarding Jews and helped them understand that they are to a large extent alike. Oftentimes, as in the case of Martyna from SKARŻYSKO-KAMIENNA, they want to stay involved: “These workshops made me want to do something, to keep on discovering

things. I would like the sites we learned about to be remembered in some way.” In this sense, the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE project is an example of civic education in the fullest sense of the term: program participants make important discoveries pertaining to their local communities.

It should be noted that for many of the participants the project is the first opportunity to develop an interest in local history. At the same time, the FORUM’S educators teach students to plan their work, divide and prioritize tasks, work in groups and identify group leaders. Students themselves

“I come from a small town where people are only interested in who does it with whom, how much money they have and why they don’t work. But there is a large group of people who would love to listen about the history of this area. This project gave me courage to learn more about it and share what I know with others. If not for the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE program, I would have never had the courage to ask local elderly residents about the history of my town. I especially appreciated workshops about multiculturalism and Jewish traditions. I think I have learned a lot about tolerance. From now on, a Jew is no longer a bearded man with sidelocks and a star of David symbol, but a person whose culture is extremely interesting, and whose ancestors were once a part of my town’s community.” – Anonymous student, Koluszki

decide what form their group project will take. Often, it is the first time in their lives that they are asked to work on their own on such a large-scale endeavor. Most importantly, thanks to the project students are not afraid to act locally and take it to the streets. Despite their young age, it is they who teach their teachers, families, neighbors and local authorities about local Jewish history.

One of the most gratifying elements of the workshops is to see how involved students become

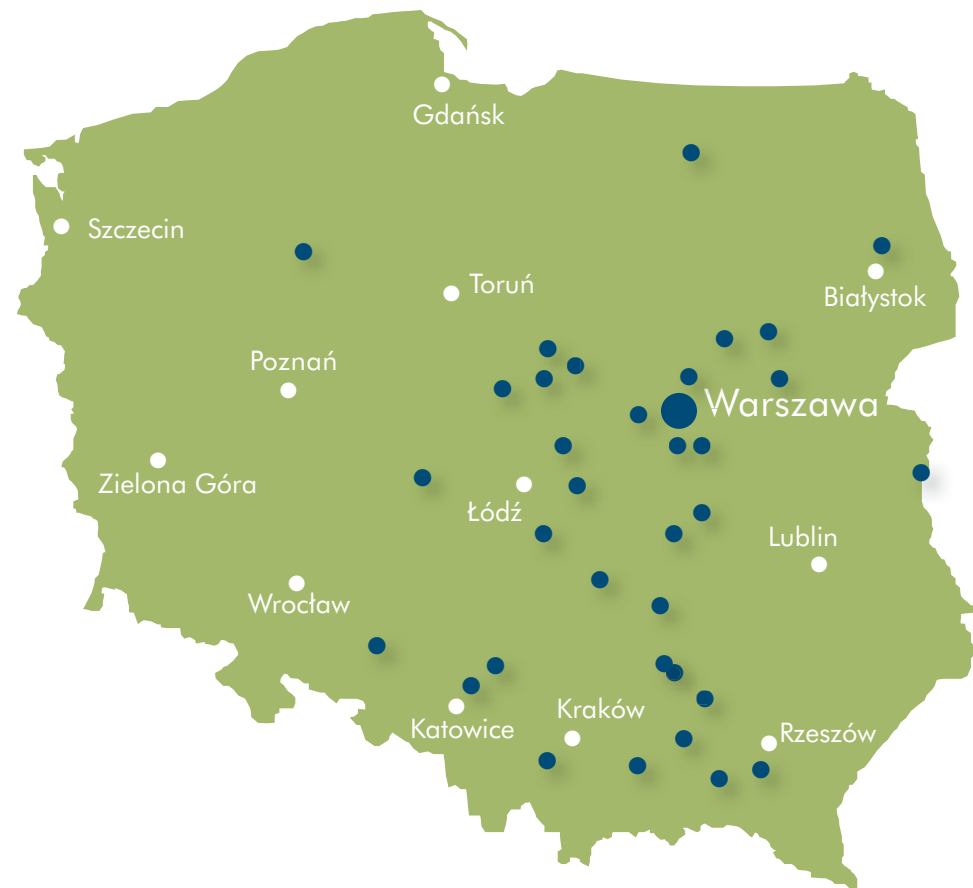
in their project work. They do not shy away from inviting local authorities and the media to amplify the project’s impact. It is not uncommon to have their actions reach surprisingly large audiences, as when all students of a given school decide to take part in the tour following traces of the former local Jewish community. As a result, these 1000 SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE participants become our local ambassadors. It is thanks to them that other residents also explore Jewish history of their hometowns.

“This program is fantastic. First, it helps us realize that stereotypes are memory’s greatest enemies. Second, it shows us that Jews are just like us. Third, now we know so much more about Jews. Fourth, now I know that Jews were important for the history of my country and my neighborhood. This is something that shouldn’t be forgotten, erased from memory” – Daniel, 18 years old, Końskie

In turn, for the descendants of Polish Jews returning to hometowns of their ancestors is all too often a bittersweet experience, especially since family memories handed from one generation to the next stand in stark contrast with the void remaining after a community that perished. The fact that the actual traces of the community’s existence are slowly turning into ruin only adds to the pain of the visitors’ experience. Thus encountering a group of sensitive and well-informed teenagers able to show visitors around their hometown’s Jewish sites and share extensive knowledge of its local Jewish community,

a group of students attuned to the complexities of Polish-Jewish relations, is one of the best ways of alleviating some of that initial tension. Such a meeting leads to an altogether different experience of Poland and its complex Polish-Jewish heritage.

With our assistance, such encounters had taken place in a few locations and proven that the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE not only restores the memory of Jewish presence in Poland, but also fosters reconciliation between Poles and Jews on a personal and local level that is especially heartfelt.



In the 2011/2012 school year 42 schools throughout Poland have become Schools of Dialogue, including schools in Bochnia, Boguchwała, Busko-Zdrój, Gąbin, Głowno, Jasło, Kalisz, Koluszki, Końskie, Kozienice, Kutno, Legionowo, Małkinia Górna, Mielec, Mrągowo, Opole, Ostrów Mazowiecka, Otwock, Piaseczno, Piastów, Pionki, Piotrków Trybunalski, Płock, Skarżysko-Kamienna, Sławatycze, Sochaczew, Sosnowiec, Szydłów, Tarnów, Wadowice, Warszawa, Wasilków, Węgrów, Zawiercie, Złotów.

Seeing their Town Anew



“I saw Sosnowiec from a different perspective. Nameless places, streets used to get from point A to B, old rundown buildings – all these places received a voice, they became a testament to history. They have created a bridge between the past and the ‘here and now.’ I think that now I know more, and understand it better.”

– Maciek, 17 years old, Sosnowiec

“These workshops help you discover an alternative universe,” says Kasia from SKARŻYSKO-KAMIENNA. “I look at my town from an entirely new perspective, I walk the same streets, but now I know what was here before.”

It is amazing when a familiar space assumes an entirely new meaning: Marzena from BOCHNIA has learned that her parents’ bank was once a synagogue, while her friends, Iwona and Agata, visited a Jewish cemetery for the first time in their lives. Both girls, born and raised in BOCHNIA, had passed the cemetery on a daily basis not knowing about its existence. Similarly, Maks from OSTRÓW MAZOWIECKA had no clue that the town had had a synagogue. Ruda, from PŁOCK, was happy to learn that an old wooden balcony is a Jewish

sukkah. In fact, PŁOCK is one of the very few places that still have these wooden balconies once used when celebrating Sukkot.

The overwhelming sense of surprise is predominant among the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE participants. “Up till now I had no clue that there had been Jews in prewar BOGUCHWAŁA,” admits a student from BOGUCHWAŁA. Paulina from WADOWICE is equally shocked to learn that the town usually associated with Pope John Paul II had a rich Jewish history as well. Dominika, Paulina’s schoolmate, notes that while preparing their project they have discovered places that are worth travelling to from across the country: places that she has never heard about before. Also, the adults participating in the Jewish tour of MRĄGOWO were surprised to learn about their town’s Jewish heritage.

“We would like to encourage everybody to start discovering the traces of Jewish past in their towns. They cannot imagine how gratifying it is to discover something new, something they knew nothing about. Search, discover, learn more and do not give up, even if you are criticized for what you do.” – Agnieszka & Marlena, 17 years old, Złotów

The Jewish past is as if a secret: mentioned neither in school, nor among relatives. The students complain that no one told them about it. Kaja, from LEGIONOWO, admits that she has never heard about the Jewish community before the workshops. A student from GĄBIN has confessed that he feels bad about not having known about such a great piece of his town’s history. Also, a lot of the students admit that although they vaguely knew about Jewish cemeteries or synagogues in their area, they just did not care about them. This gap in knowledge was examined by a group of high school students from BUSKO ZDRÓJ, who discovered that one third of local middle school

students they interviewed, did not know where the synagogue and cemetery were located, and that there had been a Jewish ghetto in the town during the war.

All the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE participants agree that the residents should see these towns as they do now. “Every single BOCHNIA resident should know at least some Jewish history of our town,” argues Justyna. “When I tell my friends and relatives about what I have learned, they are often shocked,” adds Zuzia from LEGIONOWO. I often hear the same reaction: “Jews lived here?!”



This is Also Our Heritage

From the beginning of the workshop in BOCHNIA most students agreed with Justyna's opinion, that each resident of their town should be aware of the town's Jewish history. Since it is tightly woven into that town's cultural heritage, BOCHNIA'S Jewish past should be seen as BOCHNIA'S past.

Similarly, in SKARŻYSKO-KAMIENNA students designed a tour of their town that incorporated Jewish elements into the familiar urban fabric of the town. They wanted to show Jewish heritage as part of the town's heritage.

What is also interesting and has been noted by a student from BOGUCHWAŁA, "Students' interest in the project is surprisingly high, despite the fact that investigations of local history have always been considered boring." The students realized that this small town they wished they could escape from to move to a bigger city was home to some amazing stories. Stories that have been hidden, and now they await discovery.

The students rapidly realize that Jews were a vital part of their local history and cultural heritage. They realized that these Jews are in some way their Jews.

"These amazing workshops inspired us to look for traces of Jewish life in our town on our own. Step by step we reconstructed our town anew. We had to do our own research, since all existing sources were unhelpful. The tour that we designed made us change our perception of PIONKI, once considered by us as history-less insignificant Polish town." – Marek, 16 years old, Pionki





“The SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE workshops showed us who really built this town’s history. Jews contributed to every aspect of KOŃSKIE’s past and culture. Many of my peers do not know who created this town’s heritage.” – Agnieszka, 16 years old, Końskie

In fact, the program’s local focus is the key to its success. A high school student from MIELEC is happy that these workshops motivated him to collect information about local Jewish community. He adds proudly: “In my group, we managed to uncover facts, but also curious details that should be interesting for other people.”

One of such details discovered in WADOWICE was that Jews were actually classmates of young Karol Wojtyła, the future pope, John Paul II. In front of one of local high schools, the students explained to tour participants how on Saturdays Jewish students were exempt from attendance and how they would go to special classes on Judaism. During the same tour, the topic of kosher was discussed in the very location of the former Jewish slaughterhouse, while in PŁOCK the issue was presented in a restaurant that now serves Jewish dishes.

The question remains, however, how to show remaining residents that Jewish heritage is an essential element of their town’s past? Marcin, Magdalena and Kasia from GŁOWNO have thought this problem through thoroughly: “Since our younger school friends know nothing about Jewish customs, religion and culture, we will take them on a tour during which we will discuss all these issues. Older participants may visit a photo exhibition. We want people to know how much we owe to the Jewish community in our town.”

Who Should Remember?



“The workshops showed me how little we actually know about our own past. I live in a place that once had a substantial Jewish community, constituting over a half of the town’s population, yet today there is nothing to mark their presence, nothing to remember Jews by.” – Anonymous student, Końskie



Who should do the remembering about those Jews who perished? This question is central to the discussion held during the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE workshops. Are we responsible for the memory of everyone, or of our grandparents only? Is the local Jewish past a part of our past? And if we decide to commemorate these people, what form should this commemoration assume?

One answer to the question was offered by students from KOLUSZKI, who made a documentary film entitled *Memory Once Revived should with us Stay*. In LEGIONOWO, the students also prepared a document, *Tracing a Town that Is No More*. Meanwhile, the students from PIONKI became

especially interested in the history of the nearby labor camp. They made a film, *The Forgotten History of the Labor Camp in the National Powder Factory*, in which a local history buff guides the audience around the former camp area, while witnesses talk about the dramatic challenges of the wartime. The aim of this film is to save the story of the camp from falling into oblivion.

The students from OSTRÓW MAZOWIECKA agreed that organizing a Jewish tour for younger schoolmates was not enough. They decided that all OSTRÓW MAZOWIECKA residents should learn about their former neighbors. That is why they prepared a presentation for all the school

“In under two months these workshops managed to make us, students who were completely oblivious to the history of KOŃSKIE, learn and uncover our town’s amazing, yet discarded and forgotten history of people that once made half of the town’s residents. Today we know where the places connected to the often painful Jewish history, such as the cemetery or the former ghetto area, are located. We learned about Jewish culture and religion. We will not let this history be forgotten again; through our tour of Jewish KOŃSKIE we will impart this new knowledge on our peers, overcome existing stereotypes, and open people’s eyes to the problem of anti-Semitism.” – Nina, 16 years old, Końskie

students and staff. During the presentation, which featured poetry readings and music, they also read fragments from the memoirs.

In PIOTRKÓW TRYBUNALSKI, the participants of the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE wanted to commemorate members of their former Jewish community by reconstructing individual histories of prominent figures somehow connected with PIOTRKÓW, including Irena Sendlerowa, Ernestine Piotrkowska-Rose, as well as musicians and rabbis.

The students from BOGUCHWAŁA commemorated the former Jewish community by transcribing interviews with residents of Czudec and Niebylec villages. One of the students, Nina, also managed to uncover interesting photographs from the past and talk with people who had helped Jews during the war.

For Iwona, from BOCHNIA, the aspect of the workshops that really stood out was their focus on the daily life, which seldom appears in history books. Agnieszka and Marlena from ZŁOTÓW observed that the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE taught them to

“I want something to remain, so that a piece of these peoples’ history and soul survives.” – Kasia, 17 years old, Mielec

commemorate the individual. “The two educators, Beata and Agata, showed us that Jewish culture is more than the Holocaust and death camps, but that it is the stories of particular, real people.” These are the people the students want to remember.

Like people, places also gradually fell into oblivion. Forgotten Jewish cemeteries deteriorated and slowly turned into overgrown ruins. Many of the students were appalled at the discovery of such sites. In MRAĞOWO, students took the matter of an unmarked ruined cemetery into their own hands and petitioned the town’s Mayor, who promised to do something about the site’s poor condition. In MIELEC visitors to the cemetery were informed about the Jewish custom of placing a stone on a person’s grave and were encouraged to follow this custom.

In OPOLE, the town authorities took it upon themselves to clean the area of the Jewish cemetery after members of the council took part

in a tour prepared by the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE participants. While in GĄBIN, Łukasz Florkiewicz, the cemetery’s caretaker, invited students to join him in his effort to preserve the site.

“These workshops inspired me to do more and explore more,” insists Martyna from SKARŻYSKO-KAMIENNA. “I would like the places we discovered to be marked in some way because so far there is nothing there.”



Young Experts

“It awakened our curiosity. Who knows, maybe one of us will decide to study Jewish Studies, or History in the future... An adventure that started in school and continued in adult life. This project was a truly amazing experience for me.”

– Anonymous student, Węgrów

The greatest paradox of the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE workshops is that their participants, teenagers, often teach their own teachers and parents about local Jewish history and culture. It suddenly turns out that there are no better experts on the subject than these students. They are aware of this fact. A student from WASILKÓW admits: “Up until recently my knowledge about Jews was virtually nonexistent, but after the series of workshops I can call myself an expert on the subject.” Klaudia, her friend, admits to being happy that she will be able to share her knowledge with others.

The SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE invites students to engage in independent exploration of local history. Intrigued by the topic, the participants learn about collecting data and researching. A student from PIOTRKÓW TRYBUNALSKI recounts her experiences: “It turned out that the subject is very interesting. It’s fun to visit residents and meet members of local organizations. Also, PIOTRKÓW’S older generation is enthusiastic about the subject. Personally, I have to say that when studying all these books, I discovered that no other subject had ever fascinated me to this extent.”



A student from KOLUSZKI shares a touching story of her class’s project preparation: “I heard many interesting and moving histories about Jews. Interviewing people who witnessed killings of Jews was both an extremely moving and unforgettable experience. This program has broadened my knowledge of Jewish history. I think everyone should get a chance to experience what I had.”

Talking with adults about history may be a challenge in itself. Students often noticed that elderly people have a completely different manner of recounting history. A student from JASŁO admitted that these conversations helped her to not only learn about the local Jewish past, but also to overcome her shyness.



“During the workshops we learned many interesting things about our town and Jewish history and culture. The greatest thing about it was that we discovered most of these things on our own: researching online, in books, and talking with people who remembered the times when Jews lived in Końskie. Each of us learned something interesting.” – Sara, 16 years old, Końskie

Dagmara, a student from a high school in LEGIONOWO, independently decided to photograph the tombstones preserved on the Jewish cemetery in NOWY DWÓR, so that she could show them to her friends. She remembered that the devastated cemetery in LEGIONOWO cannot offer them the opportunity to discuss the rich symbolisms of tombstone ornaments. Her friend, Paula, recorded an interview she conducted with

her elderly aunt. In SKARŻYSKO-KAMIENNA, the students discovered testimonies given by prisoners of the Hesag labor camp.

The girls from WASILKÓW recorded an interview with one of the town’s most knowledgeable resident and later invited him to walk around the town with them to show them the places he described.

Learn It, Share It

“We want to share with our peers the knowledge gathered through the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE program, show them that what we usually think about Jews are but stereotypes,” claim students from BUSKO ZDRÓJ.

Usually the young participants want to prepare something for their friends to share what they have learned. In BOGUCHWAŁA, PIONKI, TARNÓW, ZAWIERCIE, SŁAWATYCZE, PIASTÓW and PIASECZNO the students organized a tour for their schoolmates. Oftentimes, like in BOCHNIA

and KUTNO, they invite younger, middle-school students to join as well, or, like in SOCHACZEW, they extend the invitation to primary-school students. In SOSNOWIEC this invitation was sent to students from the town’s other high schools.

In OSTRÓW MAZOWIECKA the students invited other students and teachers to join their tour. In KALISZ, instead of the traditional tour, students prepared a scavenger hunt, while in SKARŻYSKO-KAMIENNA the tour took the form of an orientation run.

“At the beginning I knew nothing about Jews: what they did, how they lived. I didn’t know how many places in Płock had a Jewish connection. I really learned a lot, so now I can tell others about it.” – Dosia, 16 years old, Płock



“Together with my school friends we decided to trace the lot of the local Jewish community, so that we could share this knowledge with others. I know much more now, and I can impart this knowledge onto others.” – Julia, 17 years old, Boguchwała

For some of the projects about 30 peers are invited, while others are addressed at a larger audience, as in the case of the middle school students from MAŁKINIA GÓRNA, who invited students from most local middle schools. What is more, they repeated the tour for a group that could not make it on the set date. In KOŃSKIE, the entire school joined the tour: every 15 minutes a small group left the school accompanied by their own “guide.”

“This tour should become an element of the school’s set programs,” argues Henryk Długiełło, a teacher from ZŁOTÓW. This may mean that all future generations of ZŁOTÓW high-schoolers will discover their town’s Jewish past through a walk like that.

Go Public

“Now I want to make local residents sensitive to the memory of the former Jewish community, and to make them aware that the topic of Jews should never be a taboo. The things that I have learned should be known by everyone. This issues should be discussed among young people because it is us who have the will to change the world around us. The older generations are often afraid to talk about this. We are free of this fear and we want to change people’s opinion of Jews.” – Emilka, 16 years old, Skarżysko-Kamienna

The SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE program goes beyond the school walls, as it requires students to research the topic on their own, interview residents and experts, and discover forgotten places. In small towns these activities cannot but attract people’s attention. Anna Janus, a teacher from KOŃSKIE, has observed that through their questions these young people engage their entire families: parents and grandparents in a conversation about the past and its impact on the present and future.

When their project is ready, the students want to show off this knowledge they have gained. They often say that their neighbors should know at least as much as they do. This is the motivation behind ZŁOTÓW’s students putting up posters inviting all residents to join the tour. Even before the workshop series was completed, Michał, Dawid and Ania announced that the project would

culminate in a scavenger hunt for the entire town, a photo exhibition and a small reception for the invitees. “We hope that our activities will interest our peers and other residents,” said the students.

Similarly, the students from PIOTRKÓW TRYBUNALSKI wanted to get the attention of the town’s residents. That is why they invited

representatives of the local authorities and employees of the local tourist information center. Thanks to this, information about future tours was included into the town’s cultural calendar, and publicized among an even larger audience. In MRĄGOWO, the students invited their teachers and parents, but also local authorities and the director of the local museum and journalists.



“The tour was amazing. It was a major experience for me. At each stop we were heard interesting facts about Jewish culture and tradition.” – Barbara Borkowska, Wasilków resident



In WĘGRÓW apart from other students and teachers also the Mayor and his staff attended the tour. In the local cultural center the students set up an exhibition of prewar photographs of the town. Thanks to these activities, in fall of 2012 the tour became part of the official ceremonies commemorating the 70th anniversary of the destruction of the WĘGRÓW Jewish community.

The representative of local government in WADOWICE also participated in the tour. He was so impressed with the project that he promised to post this Jewish tour on the town's official website. In ZAWIERCIE, the teacher in charge of the program set up a website documenting her students' achievements.

The journalist from the *Gazeta Wyborcza*, a national Polish daily newspaper, Emilia Romaniuk, who reported on the project prepared by students from WASILKÓW admitted: “I really liked that it was the students who presented the history and it was an actual walk around the town. I heard that this was the first time they learned of the origins of the Łazienna street name (Pol. *łaźnia* – bathhouse). I think this was useful for everybody.” In fact, in virtually every town the local press covers the student project. From time to time even the local television reports the tour, as in the case of ZŁOTÓW and PIOTRKÓW TRYBUNALSKI. This only intensifies the impact of the project. Thanks to the media coverage more people benefit from the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE program's discoveries.

People Just Like Us



“I was most impressed by the workshop that showed that Jews are just like us. It’s a shame to admit that I, like others before me, imagined them differently. We think they wear big hats, sidelocks and long dark coats and that they have long hooked noses, but this is not the case.” – Anonymous student, Pionki

“Before, we associated Jews with long beards and greed. But now we know that this association is wrong because we owe them the rich history we have,” asserted a participant of the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE from KOŃSKIE in an interview conducted by a reporter from the French Press Agency. Another student admitted: “I had harsh feelings about Jews, but these workshops showed me that Jews are just like Catholics.”

The majority of the program’s participants has never met a Jewish person and they learn little about Jewish culture at school, focusing mostly on the history of the Holocaust rather than on the community’s daily life. This lack of knowledge is often the root of prejudice. Ania and Damian from BUSKO ZDRÓJ confess that the workshops had been food for thought: “We understood that our perspective was all wrong.” Their classmate adds that thanks to the workshop she looks at Jews differently and she would like to someday meet a Jewish person.

While discovering local history, the students often hear about specific people, their grandparents’ neighbors or childhood friends. For example in KOLUSZKI students recorded an elderly citizen reminiscing: “there were five Jews in my class. I remember Mojsze best. He was a great guy.”

“The SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE changes the way Jews are perceived in our town, their contribution is getting its due recognition. The tour enabled both students and residents to learn about Jewish history,” argues Małgorzata Gałkowska, a teacher from PIONKI.

Oftentimes, when students decide to prepare a tour for fellow students or town residents, they aim to overcome stereotypes. “There is some reluctance towards Jewish culture here, but we think that this prejudice comes from ignorance. This is why we want to organize a tour of ZŁOTÓW that will show others our town’s Jewish heritage,” said Monika, Dorota and Mateusz from ZŁOTÓW.

Meaningful Encounters

What would happen if descendants of Jews from your town came to visit you? If they wanted to see the cemetery and the synagogue, wanted to see the town? Would you be able to help them? This is how the conversation about the participants' responsibility to keep the memory of the perished Jews alive begins. Soon they are bewitched with the vision that there are people in the world who also care about their little town. They begin to long for such a meeting.

"Now I know enough to take a descendant of WĘGRÓW Jews on a tour of the town," assures a student from WĘGRÓW. "I am sure I would be able to help such a visitor," adds her classmate. "If you want to learn more about your ancestors, visit our town, my friends and I will be happy to help you," promises a student from JASŁO.

After learning so much about their towns' Jewish histories, the students would love to meet descendants of local Jews. "I would like to talk to Jews who once lived here," says a student from BUSKO ZDRÓJ. Similarly, a student from OTWOCK, who adds: "To tell you the truth, I have never seen an actual Jew in my town, which does not mean that I would not like to meet one and have a conversation with them."

Such dreams do come true. In the last school year the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE participants from GĄBIN, GŁOWNO, KUTNO, SŁAWATYCZE, PIOTRKÓW TRYBUNALSKI, RADOM and ULANÓW had an opportunity to meet descendants of Jews who lived in their towns. These visits add a contemporary dimension to the Polish-Jewish relations, and are a major step in building a new future together.



For example, the Pratt family from Australia visited GŁOWNO to see the birth town of their grandfather. Together with students from the middle and high schools they walked around the town, known in prewar times as a holiday retreat for residents of Łódź, discovering the history of local Jews. The visit finished in front of the grandfather's house, which miraculously remains intact.

In July 2012, a group of students from PIOTRKÓW TRYBUNALSKI accompanied an international group of Jews originating from the town during their regular meeting called the "Shabbaton."

The second graders from a middle school in GĄBIN showed Minna Zielonka-Packer, a member of the Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society around their town presenting the Jewish sites.

IN RADOM the U.S. Ambassador to the Czech Republic, Norman Eisen, visited Nicolas Copernicus High School. The students shared with the ambassador, his family and Lee Feinstein, the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, the Jewish history they had reconstructed.



In SŁAWATYCZE, Alan Metnick, a member of an association of descendants of Jews from this town, met young people from the school where a SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE program was underway. He told them how much he regretted not listening carefully to his aunts' stories about pre-war SŁAWATYCZE so that he could tell them more.

"If your family had once lived in SOCHACZEW, with a group of my classmates, I can show you around places connected with Jewish culture. Though little remains on the streets, there is plenty in people's memories." – Monika, 15 years old, Sochaczew



Irene Pletka came to KUTNO, where her family used to live. Meeting with her and her associates and showing them around the places relating to the town's Jewish history taught the high school students that Polish-Jewish relations are not only for the past or the future but also for today.

In ULANÓW Cheryl Fishbein, greeted with a raftsmen's song, told young people that her grandfather owned the town's rafting business. They walked the streets of the pre-war Jewish section of the town, and at the cemetery they said Kaddish together.

Warsaw: A Different Map

“Participation in these workshops entails learning a lot, but primarily it softens the stereotype of the Jew; the boys became interested in local history and begun discussing difficult issues.” – Olga Gronowska-Pszczola, teacher, Warsaw

Who here realizes when walking around Warsaw that before the war one third of its population was Jewish? Have you heard that Zionist pioneers learned how to cultivate and irrigate land on the outskirts of Grochów? Are you aware when walking about the city center and Muranów district that this area was once a ghetto? How many more mysteries related to its perished population does Warsaw still hold?

The answers to these and many other questions are obvious to Warsaw high-schoolers who took part in the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE program. They start

their venture into Warsaw’s Jewish history through a selection of city tours offered by the FORUM. They discover traces of the ruined capital, they learn the basics of Jewish culture and religion in Poland. FORUM’s educators take them to the sites related to the prewar and war history of Warsaw. They encourage students to look at familiar places in a new way. The students are surprised by the Jewish history of the Praga district, as they are when learning that a cemetery may be a wonderful source of information about the life and culture of a community.



“It made me realize about the scope of the tragedy of the Ghetto. You think you know it, but now I think I understand better.” – Jacek, 18 years old, Warsaw

The last step of the program is a conversation about commemoration. Educators discuss different ways and examples of keeping the memory alive. They ask students to come up with ways to commemorate elements of Warsaw’s Jewish past.

The students of one of the participant middle schools noticed a stone with a plaque commemorating employees of Mokotów Institute, who helped save Jews on the Ksawerów farm. What was the Mokotów Institute? Where was the farm located? The students began their own historical investigation. They contacted the Association of “Children of the Holocaust,” they looked in books and online, and asked local residents questions. They reconstructed the story of Władysław Sala, the Institute’s director, who was awarded the Righteous Among the Nations title. They documented their discoveries in a film that was

screened during the Institute’s 150 Anniversary celebration in fall 2012, to which they were invited.

In Warsaw’s district Falenica, the students of the local high school prepared an exhibition *The Life, Work and Holocaust of Falenica Jews*. The exhibition consisted of descriptions of people, places and events related to Jewish history, as well as students’ photographs and artwork. The exhibition was set up in the Wawer District Office.

Another group of students, whose school is located near the Bródno Jewish cemetery, had no idea that the cemetery is there. For their commemoration project they visited and helped clean the cemetery.

The boys from an automotive vocational school were doubtful about their completion of the project. “We cannot even manage to organize a cinema outing



and you’re asking us to prepare an independent project commemorating Jews?!” asked a student incredulously. In an act of school-targeted civil disobedience they decided they will check how much do their teachers know about the history of Warsaw Jews. They conducted a survey that exhibited the level of knowledge presented by teachers at a school located in the former ghetto area.

Yet another group of students, touched by the dramatic wartime story of Warsaw Jews prepared a model of the Warsaw Ghetto. They presented the model to other students and teachers during breaks in between classes. The visitors were told about the story of the Warsaw Ghetto.

The School of Dialogue program in Warsaw was conducted with generous support from the City of Warsaw.

Forum Educators



The success of the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE depends on the educators, their knowledge and commitment. They are the programs ambassadors to remote areas of Poland. They stand before the students and try to get them interested in discovering their local Jewish history. This task is

impossible if one does not believe in this work. It is also impossible to involve students without having a broad knowledge of Jewish culture and history in Poland. The FORUM chooses and trains only the best candidates for this difficult task.



With the project's rapid growth, the number of educators also increases. In 2012 they grew by 19 new educators, university students and PhD candidates. During intensive seminars devoted to the history of Polish-Jewish relations, Jewish culture and Judaism conducted in the spring of 2012, our team gained knowledge and skills necessary for the job of a FORUM educator.

The FORUM's educators are now a group of fifty young, motivated people, who know a lot about Polish-Jewish issues, and with their knowledge change the world every day.

Polish students delve into forgotten Jewish past

By Bernard Osser (AFP) – Nov 17, 2011


KONSKIE, Poland — Annihilated by Nazi Germany and largely forgotten by Poles, lost Jewish culture is re-emerging in Poland as youngsters scour their communities, searching for traces of Jewish life as it once existed.

In Konskie, a small town of 20,000 people located 130 kilometres (80 miles) south of Warsaw, a parking lot and a supermarket now stand on the site of a synagogue razed by the Nazis.



Eight other Jewish prayer houses were also destroyed and the Jewish cemetery is now a vacant lot.


Before the war, half of Konskie was Jewish. Today, a humble plaque fixed to house commemorating 22 Jews shot there by the Germans in September 1939 is the only visible trace of the once deeply rooted community which could trace its roots back to at least the 16th century.

Photo 1 of 3



Before WWII, half the population of Konskie in Poland was Jewish. Today, the town's Jewish past is largely forgotten (AFP, Wojtek Radwanski)





Agnieszka Maszczyk

“Polish Students Delve into Forgotten Jewish Past” BY BERNARD OSSER

Extract from an article released by Agence France-Presse, November 17, 2011 and copied by numerous international websites and news sites

Annihilated by Nazi Germany and largely forgotten by Poles, lost Jewish culture is re-emerging in Poland as youngsters scour their communities, searching for traces of Jewish life as it once existed.

In KOŃSKIE, a small town of 20,000 people located 130 kilometres (80 miles) south of Warsaw, a parking lot and a supermarket now stand on the site of a synagogue razed by the Nazis. Eight other Jewish prayer houses were also destroyed and the Jewish cemetery is now a vacant lot. Before the war, half of KOŃSKIE was Jewish. Today, a humble plaque fixed to house commemorating 22 Jews shot there by the Germans in September 1939 is the only visible trace

of the once deeply rooted community which could trace its roots back to at least the 16th century. “We didn’t know anything about KOŃSKIE’s Jewish history. We didn’t know that Jews were key in creating this town,” said Agnieszka Maszczyk, a 15-year-old high school student. “Personally, I’ve never met a Jew,” she added.

Along with 20 of her classmates, Agnieszka decided to delve into the town’s forgotten Jewish past in a project spearheaded by the FORUM FOR DIALOGUE AMONG NATIONS, an association aimed at fostering Polish-Jewish discourse.



“Le renouveau juif”

BY MALGOSHA GAGO, FRANCK VRIGNON, ANNE COHEN, BAOZI PRODUCTION

Reportage aired on Television France 2 and TV5 Monde, June 2012

The tour of Jewish Koluszki conducted by SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE participants was featured in a French documentary covering Jewish revival in Poland. The reportage was a part of a documentary television series dedicated to different countries and regions called “Un oeil sur la planète”.

The film crew followed the students and FORUM’s educators while they were exploring the Jewish traces that can be still found in Koluszki, a small town close to Łódź.

In the film, FORUM’s educator explains that the SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE program is about teaching the students the history of their town and the history of the local Jewish community shattered in their midst. In this way it aims at reducing prejudice among youth.

His words are reaffirmed by one of the students who admits that before taking part in the program, she was indifferent to this history but it is not the case anymore. She now knows that Jews are not in any way different from her.



“Every Polish Town Had Own Holocaust. Teaching the Truth About Destroyed Jewish Communities” BY DON SNYDER

Extract from an article published by The Jewish Daily Forward, January 10, 2012

Every Polish town and village had its own Holocaust. That’s what Zuzanna Radzik wants Polish children to learn. Her task is not easy. Although Polish children are taught about the Holocaust, they don’t learn what happened in their own towns.

“We bring history to children in towns and villages who have never met a Jew or seen a synagogue,” Radzik said in a telephone interview with the For-

ward. “When we show them where the ghetto was in their town and that Jews were killed there, it all becomes real.”

Radzik represents a vanguard of Poles who believe that the Jewish heritage in Poland is an integral part of Polish history and that Poles must learn about it to understand contemporary Poland. In Poland today, she is far from alone.

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FORUM FOR DIALOGUE AMONG NATIONS

SCHOOL OF DIALOGUE | ACHIEVEMENTS | 2011/2012



The School of Dialogue Gala 2011

At the Annual School of Dialogue gala in Warsaw, students who have developed the best projects present their work and national award recipients are selected.

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What You Can Do

The Forum for Dialogue Among Nations, together with U.S. based Friends of the Forum, are seeking partners to help expand and sustain the School of Dialogue program in more communities that are eager to participate. You can help build bridges of understanding and mutual respect by sponsoring a school.

For more information, please contact the Forum at forum@dialog.org.pl.

Forum for Dialogue Among Nations

The Forum for Dialogue Among Nations is a non-profit Polish organization whose mission is to foster Polish-Jewish dialogue, eradicate anti-Semitism, and teach tolerance through education. The Forum fulfills its mission through educational programs, seminars, publications, exhibitions, and exchange programs targeted at Polish and Jewish youth and leaders.

www.dialog.org.pl

Friends of the Forum

Friends of the Forum is a U.S. based (501)(c)(3) non-profit organization that promotes Polish-Jewish dialogue through educational programs, publications, discussion forums, and exchange programs dedicated to Poles and Jews. In concert with the **Forum for Dialogue Among Nations** and other NGOs, it focuses on reconciling 800 years of Jewish history in Poland with present-day dialogue. It builds bridges of memory over the gulf of prejudice.

www.friendsoftheforum.org