

Polish-Jewish Relations Activities

Częstochowa Zespół Szkół Samochodowo-Budowlanych **(Motor Vehicle Engineering and Construction School Complex)**

The *Zespół Szkół Samochodowo-Budowlanych* is one of the largest and the oldest technical schools in Częstochowa. The school can boast many years of service, its origin dating back to 1930's. Over the years, the school has changed its location. It has joined with other schools and has developed new subjects. But there have always been two main fields of study - Motor Vehicle Engineering and Construction.

From 1993 to 2011, the school complex included an Information Technology Senior High School. Currently, the school consists of Technical School No. 10 and Vocational School No. 8. The school trains motor vehicle technicians, mechanical technicians, and specializes in educating numerical control machine technicians, construction technicians, motor vehicle mechanics, motor vehicle electricians and panel-beaters.

In total, the school has 966 students and 76 teachers, with 29 classrooms, including 3 Information Technology laboratories. Additionally, there is a school library, with an information centre.

The school owns the titles of "A Quality School", "A Student-Friendly School", "A Violence-Free School", "An Enterprise-Promoting School" and "eTwinning Quality Labels". The school is involved in a number of international exchange programs such as the *Comenius* project and the Polish-Lithuanian Exchange Youth Foundation.

Regardless of our school's narrow, vocational education specialization, we also conduct Polish-Jewish relations in various ways.

REALISATION OF EDUCATION PROJECTS

Traces of the Jewish Community – People and Places (2009/2010)

The project was conducted together with the Nicolaus Copernicus Senior High School No.7 in Częstochowa. Its main aim was to highlight the Jewish community's contribution to the development of Częstochowa. It concentrated on those aspects of history in which Częstochowa Jews played a role in the life of the pre-War city. The project was intended to depict Częstochowa Jews as a lively, vivid and diverse community exerting an enormous impact on the view of the city.

The project coordinators of the project, realising the difficulty of this interdisciplinary project (History, Social Studies, Polish Language, the Historical Outline of Architecture), carried out in two different schools, divided the work to be carried out and then both teams worked concurrently on the project. Project participants met periodically for consultative meetings and then met together for a formal summing up of the teams' work.

Throughout the project, ZSSB students gathered different pieces of information while visiting the following institutions:

Galicja Jewish Museum in Kraków- students participated in workshops on Jewish traditions, history and Hebrew calligraphy. These activities were fundamental to students from both schools in order to gain knowledge on Jewish issues.

Częstochowa Historical Documentation Centre - our students took part in a series of workshops where they were acquainted with issues of Jewish history, religion and traditions. Documentation Centre staff were of practical help by providing information folders and a presentation summing up the project.

Częstochowa Monuments Conservation Service - students were given an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the Service's collections and learned of the ways of monument records are kept and which are the most significant. They also had the opportunity of viewing records relating to existing Jewish monuments in Częstochowa. The knowledge gained in the Monuments Conservation Service provided valuable material for our students to be able to follow "The Traces of Sites Commemorating the Jewish Community".

The Częstochowa Museum and Municipal Library- here, students searched for basic information on the culture, traditions and religion of Polish Jews.

The Częstochowa Old City – here, students acquainted themselves with sites inhabited in the past by the Jewish community, with particular attention places of great importance for Jews - synagogues, schools and places of business.

The Częstochowa Mikvah (Ritual Baths) - this visit gave our students an understanding of the vital role which the *mikvah* played in Jewish life. It was a great opportunity to explore the entire building and learn some history from the engaging stories told by the *mikvah* manager. During the visit, our students took detailed photographs to be used in further project work.

The Jewish Częstochowa Cemetery in ulica - our students viewed with interest well-preserved *matzevot* (headstones), especially those people who were well-known such as the Meir Justman (the *Tzadik* of Pilic) and the tomb of Chief Rabbi Nachum Asz. The young people lit candles at the tombs of the Częstochowa ghetto uprising participants and, in an atmosphere of solemnity and calm, reflected on a Jewish community which is now absent in our city.

Viewing the traces of industrial factories in Częstochowa built by Jewish capital.

The Kraków district of Kazimierz - touring the Remu and Kupa synagogues, the nearby Jewish cemetery and a walk along Kazimierz streets.

The Project was accompanied by the "Jewish Inspirations" Artistic Competition

The formal presentation of the project was held on the 21th April 2010 in the Ceremonial Hall of the Youth Cultural Centre in Częstochowa. The venue choice was not accidental. Project coordinators wanted the presentation to be a large-scale event and not only within the scope of the school.

The event was attended by representatives of education authorities and institutions and by other schools from Częstochowa which are conducting projects on Jewish subjects. Together with the presentation of our work, there was a performance by *Kalokaghatos*, a band representing the Youth Cultural Centre. The girls' trio delighted everyone with their interpretation of Jewish songs. During the ceremony the students from both schools presented their achievements.

Students from the *Zespół Szkół Samochodowo-Budowlanych* (Motor Vehicle Engineering and Construction School Complex):

- > prepared a multimedia presentation which chronicled the project work depicting the history of Jewish industry, the Jewish contribution to the city's cultural life and showed the most important monuments associated with the Jews who lived in Częstochowa;
- > created a logo for the project, taking as the central theme an old photo of one of the biggest Jewish factories, Wilhelm Kohn's paper mill
- > took a series of photos entitled "Magical Places - Traces of Jewish Presence in Częstochowa", comparing the look of sites associated with Jewish community from the pre-War period to their appearance today.
- > created a folder entitled "Traces of Sites Commemorating the Częstochowa Jewish Community".
- > created technical documentation and boards displaying the transformation of the Old Town's frontage which was, in the main, populated by Jews.
- > prepared theme display boards depicting the work of the three theme groups and made up headings developing the main subject, e.g.:
 - > "I have nothing and you have nothing, so together we have got enough to build a factory" - Jewish industry in Częstochowa
 - > "In the Wolbergs' Garden" - Jewish cultural life and education in Częstochowa
 - > "Magical places" - Jewish monuments in Częstochowa.

- > designed and created invitations to the projects presentation event, using as the main element, Willenberg's ceiling from the Old Synagogue in Częstochowa;
- > created the website <http://forsaker.pl/miejscaludzie/>

The finale of the project work was participation in the Poland national presentation held as a part of the "Restoring Memory" educational program organised by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage held in the Nożyk Synagogue in Warsaw.

"Scraps of Memories – the Jewish Holocaust in Częstochowa" (2010/2011)

The project was the continuation of the earlier "Places and People - Traces of the Częstochowa Jewish Community". This time, it concerned the extermination of Jews in Częstochowa during the Second World War. Held, as part of the project, were:

- > workshops, held at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum Archives, which enabled the students to broaden their knowledge on the tragic events of World War II - the workshops
- > meetings with Mr Antoni Bocheński and Mr Józef Ślęzak, witnesses to history, whose personal experience and accounts were a most precious source of information
- > visits to the sites strongly associated with wartime Jewish history – ul.Krótką, the Warsaw's Old Town Market (*Stary Rynek*), the Jewish Cemetery, the old railway loading ramp from which Jews were sent to Treblinka (the *Umschlagplatz*) and the Warsaw Ghetto.

Throughout the project work the following were produced:

- > a multimedia presentation - a chronicle of project activities
- > a photographic report - an attempt at collecting documents on the Holocaust in Częstochowa.
- > guidelines to an historical game "Scraps of Memories – the Jewish Holocaust in Częstochowa"

The Project - "Nothing That is Human is Alien to us ..." (2011)

This was an international project conducted as a part of the Polish-Lithuanian Youth Exchange Program. The principal aim of the project was to inspire cooperation between Polish and Lithuanian youth, to promote intercultural dialogue, to combat racism, especially religious, prejudice, stereotyping and xenophobia.

The project also had a local dimension - students gain an understanding of places relevant to different religions: Evangelical, Orthodox and Judaic, which are in or in the vicinity of their hometowns and villages. The project taught tolerance and mutual understanding.

The result of this endeavour was a publication on the differences between religions, which can be utilised by junior high school and senior high school students, class tutors and school educators.

Participation in Contests on Jewish issues.

- > First place in the municipal game "Traces of Urban Jews in Warsaw" - June 2010
- > Second place in the local contest "Conquering Hate. Holocaust – Never Again" - 2006

Distinctions

- > Provincial Competition: "The Star of David in the Emerald of Europe" - 2010
- > Polish National Competition: "Innovative Teacher - Innovative School" - 2011
- > "Together or Separately, Polish-Jewish Relations in Częstochowa" - 2012

Other Activities:

- > Participation in *Gold Hits Radio* broadcast dedicated to Częstochowa's Jewish past - the programme was regularly repeated from April to October 2011.
- > Participation in organising the local competition "Together or Separate, Polish-Jewish Relations in Częstochowa"
- > Organising History lessons with the witnesses to the Holocaust.
- > Commemorating the Holocaust Remembrance Day.
- > Participation of one of our teachers in Holocaust training at Yad Vashem in Israel.

Conclusion

Taking part in educational projects on the history, culture and traditions of Judaism was a new experience for the students which, as they say themselves, changed their perception of the Jewish people. It made them more open towards the Jewish community and developed a positive attitude of tolerance towards different religions or cultures. It also broadened knowledge on crucial events concerning our regional history. In the process of learning about the history of Jewish community in Częstochowa, our students recognised the important role this nation played in the cultural, social and economical life of our city.

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