



A memorial excursion to Auschwitz, undertaken by youngsters of the Learnworkshop Hellersdorf, Berlin, Germany, 2000

The present political and social situation in Germany and especially in Hellersdorf was the initial reason for rising the desire by some young people to learn more on the history of the country of their own (National Socialism) which has not been treated satisfactory at school according to their opinion.

You can say that democratic thinking youngsters feel themselves more and more faced with an increasing acceptance of fascist and racist attitudes e.g. denial of the Holocaust and the genocide as well as renewing revisionist theories. In the face of this situation which jeopardises our democratic order the youngsters decided to have experienced the scene of the crimes committed by the Nazis. They wanted to get more information which enables them to refuse the right wing developments more effectively.

The permanent contact and tough disputes with young people who stand for right wing attitudes in their neighbourhood and also in the Learnworkshop Hellersdorf have helped them to recognise that they have to strengthen their ability to argue by undertaking an excursion to "Auschwitz".

While preparing the weekend visit the topics have focused on questions like how to compensate the unforeseeable emotional strain with which they would have to tackle as well as the fears ("I'm afraid of possibly having to judge German history in a more negative point of view after this visit") and expectations ("I expect from this visit that I can make experiences there which I can pass to other people").

The activity started on June 16th, 2000 and lasted during the weekend. Our friend Jan Luczynski, pedagogue from Krakow gave us a hearty welcome already at the station and he carried for us during our stay in Krakow. He was more than friendly.

The visit of the concentration camp of Auschwitz and seeing the exhibitions made the young people and me deeply affected and we felt down and helpless.

Jan made it possible to visit two projects in Krakow. The first one was a youthclub to integrate disadvantaged young people. The other is a multiethnic integration project where we discussed some methods to prevent racialism.

Although the travel lasted only for a weekend the impressions they have got there were very intensive and the youngsters stressed that it will them influence for life. The statement of one participant was for example: "I felt totally deaf and I had to retire myself for weeks after the visit".

One of the results of the trip was the unanimous insight of the necessity to develop more courage. Another participant's statement is: "What about courage?! As a single person I can do nothing! I am only afraid!"

Jürgen and Helga, Learnworkshop Hellersdorf, 2000