



PARTICIPATORY VISIT IN SOSNOWIEC, POLAND HELD SINCE 9TH TILL 11 TH OF NOVEMBER 2021

An international partnership visit, organised within the project "**Youth Steps Against Power Abuse (2019- 1- PL01- KA205- 062772)**", took place at the headquarters of Active Women Association on 9-11 November 2021 in Sosnowiec.

During the visit, our partners from the organizations Permacultura Cantabria from Spain, CFCECAS from Romania and AENIE from Portugal learned about examples of power abuse and negative social phenomena in Poland in areas such as; women's rights, refugees, LGBT+ people and in the field of education and ecology. There was also time to get to know and visit Silesia's post-industrial cultural sites.

We began the meeting by introducing our guests to the history and profile of the Active Women Association. At the beginning we presented selected projects of the Association such as "Counteracting the abuse of power" or "Breaking the silence". We also mentioned the implementation of empowerment treks, local projects such as "SOSnowiczenie", "Zagłębie Women's Route" and volunteer projects.

This was followed by a screening of the documentary "Hope dies last". "Hope dies last" by Jonathan L. Ramsey, which told the story of young activists fighting to change the attitude of politicians towards ecology and to take concrete action on climate change. The new documentary by the makers of "You Can Panic" focuses on the personal reflections, dilemmas and fears of teenage activists from all over Poland growing up in the shadow of a climate catastrophe. The screening was followed by a discussion about the film with the participation of young activist Olga Sajbert, a member of the Youth Climate Strike.

Olga introduced the participants to the activities of the Youth Climate Strike. She talked about the conducted protests and its effects on the participants, but most of all she presented the motivations and goals of young people in the area. Our partners were

impressed both by the film, which dealt with the topic of climate change, and by the activity of the 17-year-old Olga, who is actively working against climate change.

In the evening we invited our guests to the Silesian Museum, where we visited a multisensory exhibition on the history of the Silesian region.

The next day of our partnership visit started with a speech by Jakub Knapik, a 22-year-old social activist working for LGBTQ+ and refugee rights. Jakub gave us an insight into the problems of LGBTQ+ people in Poland, including the problem of youth suicides, and mentioned that as many as 73% of LGBTQ+ school children are afraid to be themselves because of the reactions of their peers.

Our partners from Romania, Spain and Portugal were very moved by the picture of how sexual minorities are in Poland. They could not believe how propaganda and manipulation can blind society's eyes.

The second part of Jakub's presentation concerned current events on the Polish-Belarusian border. He mentioned that doctors, activists and all people who want to help immigrants are hindered in their ability to help.

Another point on the agenda was the visit of a representative of Dziewuch z Sosnowiec, Dagmara Dąbek, who told the participants about the first protests in Sosnowiec and how, unfortunately, with time she lost faith that her actions would have any effect. Dagmara's activities concern the fight for women's rights in Poland, including the right to abortion, which has been recently tightened.

During the protests, the police showed aggression towards the protesters and in some cities the organisers were sued. The protests did not bring the expected result, but after recent events - fatal cases of pregnant women who died as a result of health complications and not receiving adequate medical care - a new wave of protests broke out under the slogan **#NeverOneMore**.

For a breather from difficult topics, as part of our exploration of Silesia's post-industrial monuments, we visited two mine shafts where new investments have been made. The first one was the Level 450 climbing wall, where the participants had an opportunity to try their hand at climbing. The second was the art gallery in Wilson Shaft. The guests were impressed how new meanings and functions were given to post-industrial spaces.

The last day of our partnership meeting was opened by Mateusz Gwodz, a 17-year-old activist, member of the Razem party and student at a secondary school in Katowice, who talked about the re-establishment of the Youth City Council in Zawiercie. Referring to the topic of Youth City Councils, Mateusz also brought us closer to the subject of the abuse of power in relation to democratic youth institutions.

Staying on the topic of youth, and therefore education, we welcomed our next guests - representatives of the Dopamina Lab organisation from Dąbrowa Górnicza, Anna Deboń and Robert Strzela. Anna and Robert's presentation concerned the activities of their organisation,

which seeks to implement changes in school education by, among other things, analysing school statutes - above all, whether they comply with the law. Their organisation claims that assessment is supposed to be a feedback to the student, while it is a tool for manipulation, oppression and abuse of power.

Every assessment affects the life of a student - the learning process should be voluntary, not forced, making it ineffective.

Statutes often define the physical appearance of students, while the content of the constitution contradicts the assumptions of these statutes. Some schools even penalise behaviour outside school premises, prohibit membership of subcultures or the expression of certain opinions. Dopamine wants changes in this field, so that the education of young people is more like a relationship, rather than swamping students with material, tests and enforced versatility.

The last item on the agenda was the screening of the film "Sisters", which was produced by our Association as part of the "Young Women Leaders of Afghanistan" project. The protagonists of the film are sisters: the youngest Zohra, Gaisu and Parastu. They belong to the absolute elite - they come from the most liberal families in Kabul. Their fathers, brothers or husbands agreed, often against the ostracism of their extended family and environment, to let them participate in the project's workshops - alone, without the "protection" of men. This is a very progressive approach in their community.

The film "Sisters" prompted our partners to discuss and share their feelings about the story presented. During the discussion, we introduced the participants to the follow-up of the Sisters, with whom our Association is still in contact.

We then evaluated our partnership meeting and shared our impressions. Our foreign partners were impressed with the organisation of the meeting and appreciated the comprehensive way in which the Association presented the problem of the abuse of power in Poland. It was a very fruitful visit, which allowed us to get to know our strategic partners better. This will certainly help us to create new, interesting projects, which will be able to change the reality around us.