

On a Mission: Through the Eyes of a Young Pole

By Jerzy Hornik

It is a chilly morning in Fairmont, a small farm town in Southern Minnesota. Overnight flurries carpeted the corn fields with a quilt of iridescent snow. Eleventh grade students at a local Junior Senior High flock into their classroom to gain a teaching in political science.



Today these tenth graders will hear from Kasia Wilinska about the lives of their counterparts in Poland.

Kasia Wilinska is from Uścikowo, a village about the size of Fairmont, located twenty miles north of Poznan.

Kasia came to America seven years ago. Before settling down in Maple Grove, she lived and worked in New

York. Her background as a teacher and translator of English propelled her to explore America.

“In college I was intrigued by America’s ethnic diversity. And I knew the only way to truly understand America’s cultural landscape was to interact with real Americans,” she reminisces.

Since her arrival, Kasia became captivated with American lifestyle. She says the freedom, diversity and curiosity of American people kept her in the U.S. “America has not only given me

economic opportunities but also enabled me to learn from people from all the different walks of life from around the world.”



Almost every day Kasia hears ominous accounts of her peers’ leaving Poland for new lives across Europe and the world—all in search of higher wages, better living conditions, education, and perhaps,

most intriguingly, the experiences they otherwise would not have on their home soil.

Kasia believes this new trend must not be seen as a negative effect of European Union's expansion but "an unprecedented opportunity for young skilled Poles to go elsewhere to take on challenges and embrace economic prosperity and social equity." Kasia claims young Poles like herself pursue these opportunities because they need a stimulus to bring fresh ideas, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit back to Poland.



"Most young people leave Poland and will most likely return with ideas and inspiration they need to raise their families, communities, and economy out of economic gridlock," she hopes. "With these opportunities, there is also one other positive effect—young Poles become Poland's best advocates."

With the help of the Minnesota International Center, Kasia reaches out to American elementary, high school and college students to talk about contemporary Poland. "Imagine if all Poles, be they natives of Poland or second or third generation Poles, came together to promote Poland as a destination with modern infrastructure, unparalleled comforts, and a reignited economy, I am sure Poland would become more visible in the world."

From Leeds in England to Shanghai in China young Poles are becoming the most powerful marketing tool for the old-time and 21st century Poland. Young Poles are eager to share what they've got in common with the rest of the world and heed what they learn to improve the livelihoods of their countrymen.



In Kasia's eyes, "most people ask questions out of sheer curiosity not ignorance—they do it in an effort to connect across the human spectrum." "Why not give others an opportunity to learn about Poland from first-hand sources, not from the critical media, and in exchange bring home ideas that can help us build a stronger country."

Kasia says, "It feels it is my personal mission to educate others about Poland and learn as much as possible from them." How about you? Are you ready to take on similar challenges to educate kids and fellow community members about Poland? Come join the vibrant group of intercultural educators at the Minnesota International Center to share your story with young people in Minnesota. Call 612.626.4987 or email ghornik@umn.edu for more information.