

Spotting Belchatows Micro-Values

Which characteristics must be addressed to create a common sustainable future?

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THE PROJECT

Belchatow, a monotown* in Poland dependent on the industry of electricity production from lignite coal, is facing imminent regression due to decreasing coal resources and stricter EU Climate Policies. The city has a unique opportunity to proactively think of innovative alternatives for their current industry, however that requires the formation of a completely new image of the city thus a stronger political engagement and sense of imagination of its residents. With our project we are addressing this issue through proposing a series of events, directed at the youth, which aim to engage them in numerous activities that allow them to gain a new perspective on Belchatow and acquire skills of creative thinking, civic engagement as well as collaborative work.

*Town dependent on a single industry.



BELCHATOW

Belchatow is located in the Belchatow County, in Lodz Voivodeship and is currently known as the 'Energy Centre of Poland'. Its economy is in majority reliant on the existence of Belchatow's Power Station, which is run using lignite coal from its adjacent mines Belchatow and Szczercow. The entities are so vast that they cover the communes of Szczercow, Kleszczow, Rogowiec and Belchatow. Belchatow Power Station belongs to PGE Górnictwo i Energetyka Konwencjonalna S.A. and directly hires over 4,500 workers (PGE.S.A, 2019).



METHODOLOGY OUTCOME

Our main point of focus was discovering which characteristics of Belchatow should be addressed or discussed with the youth in order to initiate the creation of a common sustainable future and evoke the desire to care for the development of their city.

During our visit we have noticed that Belchatow has many characteristics, which give the city a very unique and significant charm, yet currently go unnoticed, hidden or taken for granted.

In our opinion these characteristics were an inseparable part of the social and urban fabric, making them fundamental elements of the city's growth and development, which is why in our project we have given them the tag of 'treasures' and concentrated on giving our participants skills, which would allow them to notice those treasures and use them to their fullest potential.

Our outcome is a proposal for a three day event.

The first event aims to set the general scene for our intervention through a participatory performance by a Polish artist, Joanna Zabielska.

The second part is a workshop organised for the PGE Giganty Mocy Museum, where the youth develops theoretical and practical skills.

The third event aims to put the skills the youth has gained during the workshop into use in their daily lives or a public space. Through giving this responsibility to our target group we hope to make our impact more sustainable and permeated into the social fabric of Belchatow.

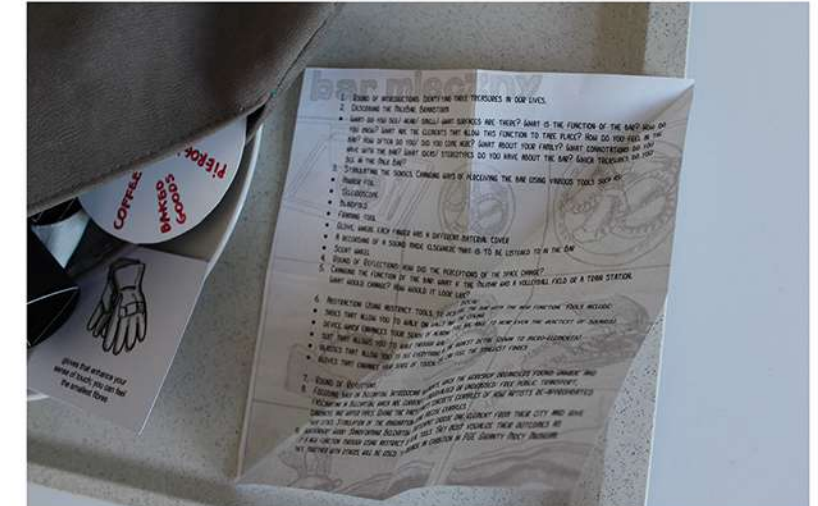
Although coal is considered to be Belchatow's biggest economic treasure, the area also offers man-made wellness and sports facilities such as an artificially erected ski-slope, cycling paths, forest routes, hiking opportunities and a wide range of indoor and outdoor sports. There is also a rich bank of local, historical and social knowledge, which expresses itself in various forms such as relationships between inhabitants or daily habits. Additionally the city is architecturally, socially and geographically positioned between a rural and industrial area, which creates many contrasting views and infrastructural elements.

We are presenting our proposal to the PGE Giganty Mocy Museum as well as to the University of Applied Arts in Vienna in a form of an installation, which already uses some of the infrastructural elements of Belchatow - the MilkBar, which is a traditional Polish eatery. Using elements of this significant part of the city's built environment in an original way, as a method to present our project proposal, not only allows us to test our own strategies of using new perspectives, but also utilizes a certain language which can be understood by our target group, creating an interplay between the unfamiliar (our project) and the recognizable. Our final exhibit shows our ideas in a form of three meals, in this case 'pierogi', which our participants can metaphorically consume if they wish to be a part of our events. Each 'dish' displays a single event in a distinctive way.

EXHIBITION

The first pierogi includes an audio explanation of the reasoning behind the choice of the artist, the second one shows the tools used during our workshop and the structure we have designed in collaboration with our partner and artists from both Poland and Vienna. The third 'meal' is a representation of the instruction cards our participants will receive on the third day of our intervention. We also included a 'menu', where we wrote out our preferred timetable and locations.

Our future plans are to implement our planned intervention in Belchatow, reach out to similar initiatives and create a network of creatives in industrial regions of Poland.



The project was developed as a Master Thesis for MA Social Design at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna by Zuzanna Zajac and Marlene Hübner.