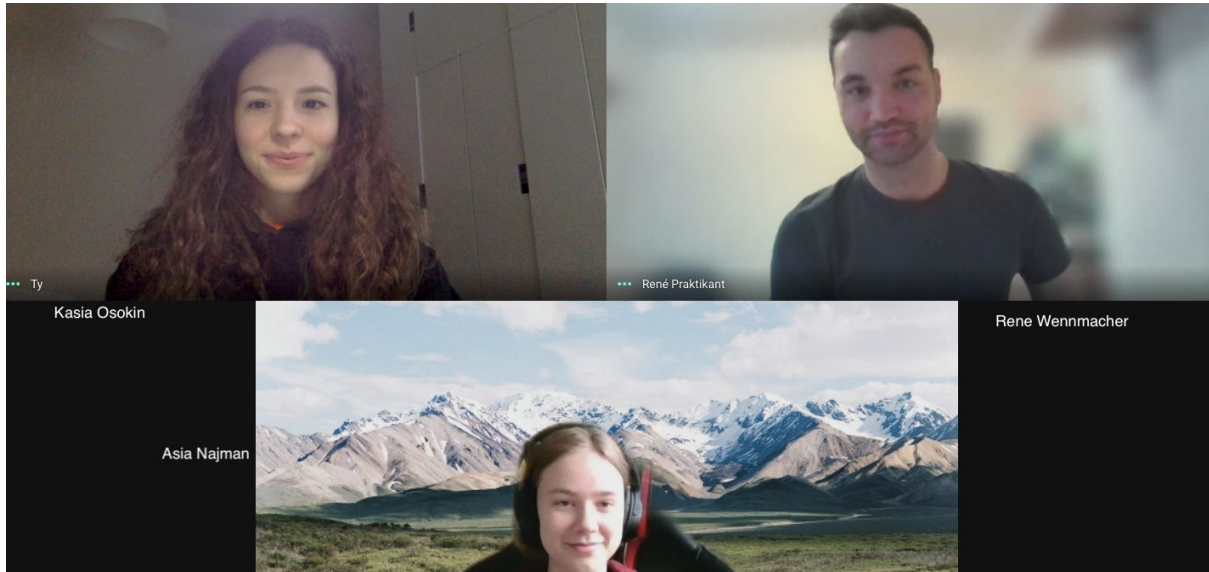


# Coming to Poland for educational reasons

Interview with Rene Wennmacher, a trainee at WBS in Warsaw



## 1. Introduction:

Rene Wennmacher, 24 years old, raised without an international migration background (German is his native language), is studying Polish as a foreign language and history in Potsdam, is starting with writing his Master's thesis. He went to Cracow for an educational tour to visit several museums and the historical place Auschwitz-Birkenau in 2011. During this stay, his interest in Poland and its culture and history deepened. He came back in 2015-16 for voluntary service to help a Polish elementary school with German lessons. This stay in Poland resulted in him knowing what to study. In 2018 he went on Erasmus and spent a semester at the Jagiellonian-University in Cracow at the institutes for history and Polish and Jewish studies. The reason for his interest in Poland was the already experienced contact with Poland and its language, as well as its music.

## 2. Why Polish?

“Polish always sounded very interesting and different, since it sounded a bit “Chinese” without any knowledge of the language because of its sibilants. When I was at my friends they usually spoke Polish with their parents. When I attended the educational tour, I started to listen to Polish music. Also when my grandmother died I learned, that I had german roots from Wałbrzych which made me even more interested. After the voluntary service in 2015-16, the contact with Poland finally made me decide on what I wanted to study.”

### 3. Were there any positive aspects or challenges?

Either the internship semester was to be completed in Germany or abroad. He chose our school after he had already completed an internship at the German-Polish school in Berlin and now wanted to see how the German-Polish school in Warsaw, i.e. on the Polish side, works. He likes it very much. He is pleased about the internship, but the Corona pandemic makes the working conditions difficult. The German-Polish relationship and cooperation was a big plus point for the decision, he thinks it's great that the students know so much about both sides and that they behave and treat each other with respect. The challenge was, on the one hand, the pandemic and on the other to prepare the lessons for the different levels of students at the school. It is funny and strange for him that sometimes older pupils deal with easier things in Polish lessons than younger ones, but this is due to the short stay of the pupils in Poland.

### 4. Is it easy for you to live in Poland?

The first 4 weeks have always been hard for him, he moved to Poland in 2015, 2018 and 2020. 3 times he had to start "new", so the first 3-4 weeks are the hardest, he was afraid that his Polish is not good enough, but after 4 weeks he has settled in and everything is great. He loves to live in Poland. He wants to stay here and after his internship, he will extend his stay in Poland. He always tries to stay in Poland as often and as long as possible, he loves the Polish language and culture.

### 5. How do you perceive the Polish people?

In his opinion, Poland is portrayed too negatively in the media because of politics. Politics publicly represents society, but this is not really 100% true for Poland, as the public protests across Poland in the last weeks, months and years have shown, he feels that the majority of Poles do not support the policies of the PIS government.

Rene has met mostly good-hearted, friendly and open-minded people in Poland, especially if you try to speak the Polish language, he has never had a problem with Poles, he has experienced a lot of hospitality, for example, he cannot go home to Germany this year because of the pandemic, and he has had received many invitations from friends and acquaintances to spend Christmas with them.

### 6. Why our school?

For him, it was very important to be at a German-Polish school, on the one hand, to be able to live in Poland again and to speak Polish, and on the other to promote the exchange between Germany and Poland at school and thus make his own contribution. With people of different nationalities, there are sensitive historical topics discussed such as the Second World War. He likes to teach Polish to Germans, he has a lot of daily contact with Poles, he made his best friends in Poland, for example, because of Erasmus and his studies. He hopes to make new contacts at school; he does a lot of things that are related to history and the relationship and cooperation between Germany and Poland.

He has done several voluntary services in the museum and the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial because this kind of work is essential to him, he was awarded a prize by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum for this work:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7r9a-sRFuxs&t=1s&ab\\_channel=MiejscePami%C4%99ciMuzeumAuschwitz-Birkenau](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7r9a-sRFuxs&t=1s&ab_channel=MiejscePami%C4%99ciMuzeumAuschwitz-Birkenau)

7. Would you recommend such experience to other students?

"I would definitely recommend an internship abroad. Also at the German-Polish encounter school. You can gain an incredible amount of new experience that you don't get in your own country. I became much more independent, open and sensitive towards other people and difficult topics abroad. You leave your "bubble of habit". But this opens up not only new experiences but also the opportunity to act internationally and make new friends and contacts."

8. Would you do it again?

"Yes, definitely. Schools are where you have the most contact with different people, cultures and opportunities but also challenges. When these challenges are mastered, it makes an enormous contribution to one's own personal development. I have experienced this in all my internships and voluntary services at home and especially abroad. The school is indeed again a bundle of all these advantages."

9. Did your internship help you to become a teacher of history and Polish as a foreign language?

"Yes! I think I would like to take a break from teaching after my studies to gain more experience in an institution for cultural and contact exchange between Poland and Germany. On the other hand, after the experiences I had at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial, I would also like to work at a memorial, because this is something that occupies me a lot at the moment. After a certain break of one or two years, I would then probably complete my traineeship in Germany and either in teaching Polish as a foreign language and history or in an institution for German-Polish relations and cooperation."