

## **Results of the 12th History Competition in Poland 2007/08**

### **“A small homeland in memory and testimonies”**

This year's topic of the Polish history competition (twelfth edition) organized within the framework of the “History at Hand” program, addressed to high school and middle school students, had been formulated as: “A small homeland in memory and testimonies”. The competition topic had been announced in June 2006.

359 competition entries had been submitted (157 group works and 202 individual), written by 637 students (70% of girls), from 252 schools, located in 145 Polish towns and cities. The largest number of entries was submitted from Małopolska voivodship (45 entries, constituting 23,5%). In general, submitted entries came from small towns (those up to 30 000 inhabitants) – 45,7%. Only 9,2% of all entries were sent from large cities of more than 500 000 inhabitants. This vividly shows were the “history at hand” theme meets with greatest response.

34% of all entries were submitted from middle schools (122 entries from 103 middle schools); 144 entries were written by students from 83 schools that participated in the competition for the first time – it is quite visible that the competition is gaining new recipients. 204 tutors, mostly teachers, accompanied the students in their research.

The participants were asked to search for those small homelands that had stayed alive only in the memories of their inhabitants or in the testimonies of the passing generation. The reconstruction of such places, many of which do not exist any more, presented by concrete, life-experienced people – constituted the core of this year's competition. We expected to overcome the barriers set by the school program in formal regional education, which resulted in ethno-geographical presentations of the region or in biographies of certain people from the given place. We received – unfortunately quite a lot of – such entries, which evidently have been prepared in relation to different competitions; fulfilling different aims.

Despite such difficulties, numerous students and teachers fulfilled the increased expectations of this competition round. We received quite a lot of exceptional papers, presenting the Polish borderland, faraway places, sometimes even exotic, which – as an effect of migrations or other, sometimes dramatic, historical events: wars, displacement, border-change or other civilization changes - became small homelands (however usually already long-gone). It were the people, and especially the relations with them, rather than nature or architecture, which decided upon what image of the small homeland had been preserved in the memory of the people described in the research paper. The accounts of such witnesses, through the eyes of which the students could reconstruct such places, decided whether the submitted entry fulfilled the aims and regulations of the competition.

We did not accept those research papers that were constructed as a monographic presentation of a place, but also we disqualified those entries, which presented interesting biographies, but which to an insufficient extent were related to the places the witnesses identified themselves with. In some papers small homelands were defined in an original, but sometimes risky or very subjective way. Parishes, buildings, schools, workplaces or any space delimited by certain common emotions or experience – any integrating factor – often became small homelands. Every time, the jury carefully analyzed whether such interpretations were consciously and consequently employed.