**Hajnówka wants to be attractive both for residents and tourists. The Norwegians will help**

**Alta in northern Norway and Hajnówka are cities that share several similarities. They are located far from the center of the country and large urban centers, they have almost the same population, and there are sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. On the other hand, there is a lot between them. Hajnówka has been depopulating for years and losing its socio-economic functions, while Alta has recorded an increase in population and is popular with tourists. What can Hajnówka do to be as successful as Alta? The guests from Norway who came to Hajnówka this week told about it.**

Alta is the partner city of Hajnówka in the project "Hajnówka Renewal - Green Transformation", which the local government has been implementing for several months. The mentioned visit, which lasted on May 4-5, is an important element of this project.

*- We met for a reason. Rock carvings from several thousand years ago, included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, have been found in Alta. We have such a status in the Białowieża Forest, said* ***Jerzy Sirak****, the mayor of Hajnówka. - For this reason, in both local governments there were similar problems to be solved, therefore we would like to take advantage of the good experiences and good practices of the city of Alta in Norway. In order - on the one hand - to implement the project as well as possible, and on the other hand - we would like to introduce in our city some solutions that have been tested there permanently.*

The Norwegian partner was represented by: John Harald Skum, cultural advisor, Jan Dolor, director of the Alta museum, Kaja Kristensen, representative of the youth house and project leader, Tor Helge Reinsnes Moen, head of the culture department at the city hall and Gunn Heidi Henriksen, project coordinator.

**Alta - the path to success**

What was the beginning of Alta's road to success? They are associated with the museum and a group of volunteers who started to work based on the history of this place. It is about the aforementioned rock carvings, which a group of residents really wanted to show to Norway and the world. Later, local and national authorities joined their activities. Most of the activities are focused around the museum in Alta. Its history began 50 years ago, and as representatives of Alta assure, work continues there all the time.

*­ The museum is both a tourist information point and an information center for the UNESCO site, explained* ***Jan Dolor,*** *director of the Alta Museum. - Currently it is financed from three sources. The money comes from the commune, poviat and state. The fourth source is ticket sales.*

The museum's program was introduced 20 years ago and is constantly being improved. For example, there are classes for schools. They last two weeks each fall. The proposals include, for example, cooking workshops like in the Stone Age or working with flint. Classes are very popular and are attended by students from schools in the area and the region.

What the guests from Norway emphasized many times was the need to educate from an early age. It is about shaping an awareness that makes people proud of their heritage and makes it part of their identity. This will avoid problems in the future.

*- In 1984, the rock drawings were protected as part of the UNESCO heritage - said* ***Tor Helge Reinsnes Moen****, head of the culture department at the city hall. - They were discovered in a place where residential development was planned. This caused and continues to do with problems. It is impossible to build a house with at least one historical stone. There have been conflicts more than once on this background. Today, however, we are proud that we made a difficult and important decision to protect this place.*

**The main goal - young people**

The representative of the local government from Alta emphasized that on the one hand, the protection of the place introduced a number of restrictions, but on the other hand, it gave the city an impulse for development. The place has become a tourist attraction. There is a lot going on here, from the aforementioned activities organized by the museum, to what the city does in terms of winter attractions, such as dog sled racing. One of the main goals of all events organized in Alta is the activation of young people. Young people who come from here go to study in larger places, and even other countries, and spend several years there. But many of them are coming back. And this is precisely the goal the city is striving for.

- They must feel that this is a good place to live, to raise children. That they will not only have a job here, but also a varied everyday life. They must associate this place well, they must have fun here, explained **Gunn Heidi Henriksen**, project coordinator.

These activities are paying off, as the number of Alta residents increases by 1% every two years.

**Flagship activities - the city center and the Academy of Nature**

The experiences and comments of the Norwegians will inspire the activities that will take place in Hajnówka under the project. The most important will include the creation of a city center that would integrate and activate residents. It will be built in the vicinity of the city hall and the park. The plan is also to establish the Academy of Nature. Places where especially younger residents, but not only, will be able to get to know the natural treasures of the Białowieża Forest.

The project "Hajnówka Renewal - Green Transformation" is to be an impulse for the city's development. Within its framework, the local government established cooperation with numerous partners, including Białystok University of Technology, Białowieża National Park and the Mammal Research Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Białowieża. Each of them will prepare a form of attractions that will allow you to get to know the surrounding nature in an active and interesting way. The project will last two years and the grant amount is EUR 3.5 million.