

BETWEEN EUROPE AND AFRICA

SCIENCE ON THE MOVE

Usually, getting there is a quicker ordeal, but this time it took 24 hours. After leaving Poland, we had to spend a night at the Frankfurt Airport waiting for a flight to Kenya. When we finally landed in Nairobi, we still had a train journey to Mombasa ahead of us. Charter flights are shorter, allowing you to save up to ten hours at the expense of comfort – sitting in a cramped space with your knees up to your chin. Scheduled flights are less demanding, but two or three layovers extend the entire trip to two days or more.

Photos from the top:

1. Children from the primary school in Wasini | Photo: Anna Watola
2. Classes with pupils at the primary school in Amboseli | Photo: Marta Sitkowska
3. Meeting at a primary school in Mombasa | Photo: Barbara Gniadek



✉ Anna Brosch, PhD
anna.brosch@us.edu.pl

Anna Watoła, PhD
anna.watola@us.edu.pl

Institute of Pedagogy
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Silesia

The above description sounds like an excerpt from a travelogue, and in a sense it is. However, it does not refer to a sightseeing trip but a scientific expedition and research. Anna Brosch, PhD, and Anna Watoła, PhD, both from the Institute of Pedagogy at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Silesia, have been visiting selected African countries for years as part of various scientific initiatives. They are currently working on the project entitled 'Growing online – how to protect our children in the digital world?'. The experts want to take a look at the problem of the so-called 'sharenting' – parents sharing images of their children on social media – which carries many potential risks. The study will collect data from Poland, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, and Kenya. 'Many of our doctoral students are interested in travelling abroad. Everyone is keen on going to London or Prague, but getting people to go to Nairobi is proving more of a challenge', says Anna Watoła. She explains that many people are put off by the relatively long stay, which can extend up to two months. The conditions, which are different from those we are used to in Europe, also pose a challenge. The much warmer climate in the Mombasa area, combined with high humidity, which can reach 90% at times, can be difficult to handle for those not accustomed to it. Appropriate clothing is, therefore, essential – during the day to protect against excessive sun and at night to prevent insects from coming into contact with the skin. Large mosquito

populations and the risk of certain diseases mean that vaccinations and preventive measures are recommended before travelling to Africa and during your stay on the continent. People with sensitive stomachs who prefer to avoid meat or seafood might struggle. The same goes for those who value their privacy, as it is not uncommon in Kenya to find yourself sharing a room with several people, including strangers. The experts point out these potential inconveniences not to discourage young researchers. On the contrary, they want to prepare them for the challenges that lie ahead and the extraordinary opportunities to explore various social processes and learn about different cultures. The research carried out by the scientists cannot be conducted online. In a country where many households still do not have regular access to electricity, relying on electronic surveys would only limit the group of respondents. 'We want to reach everyone, so we will use questionnaires printed and translated into Swahili, because although Kenya has two official languages, English and Swahili, many people, especially the older generation, do not speak English at all', explains Anna Brosch, head of the research project on sharenting. Including Kenyans in the study, in addition to Poles, Britons and Czechs, will provide valuable knowledge about the impact of modern technologies on communities that started using them a little later than those in the so-called West. Experts from the University of

Silesia note that while sharenting in Europe has now taken the form of a marketing machine involving celebrities and influencers, in Africa the phenomenon is only just beginning to spread. Kenyan parents post photos of their children online with even less awareness of the dangers involved, such as potential exposure to paedophiles or (even unintentional) ridicule of young people, which can lead to developing self-esteem issues or difficulties in relationships with their peers. As part of the project, cooperation has already been established with researchers from Pwani University in Kenya. These contacts were established during previous trips – Anna Brosch spent over a year in Kenya and, together with Anna Watoła, visited African countries over 30 times. The acquaintances made years ago are now bearing fruit in the form of further scientific cooperation with local experts. Despite their extensive knowledge of the region, both researchers still find things that amaze them, and their curiosity remains a driving force behind their scientific expeditions. 'About five years ago, a new and very modern railway line built by the Chinese was put into operation. I dreamt of riding it, but unfortunately my friend beat me to it!', Anna Watoła laughs and adds: 'This railway is unlike anything else in Kenya – it is punctual. The locals not only have a unique approach to time but also a saying that contains profound wisdom: You have watches, we have time'.