

Case study report (Code PL2C)

**Artystyka: an ecotouristic farm that shows
how art, local engagement and mutual
respect can help newcomers take roots in
a rural community**

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Context

Artystyka is located in South-Western Poland, in a mountainous region of the Klodzko Valley near to the Polish-Czech border. Briefly explaining the characteristics of this region is important for understanding the context of the case study. The Klodzko Valley is in fact a dale, i.e. it is surrounded by mountains from each direction with some more easily accessible passes from the North (leading toward Wrocław, the regional capital some 120 km to the north), the South (PL-CZ border in Boboszów/Dolní Lipka) and the West (PL-CZ border in Kudowa-Zdroj/Nachod).

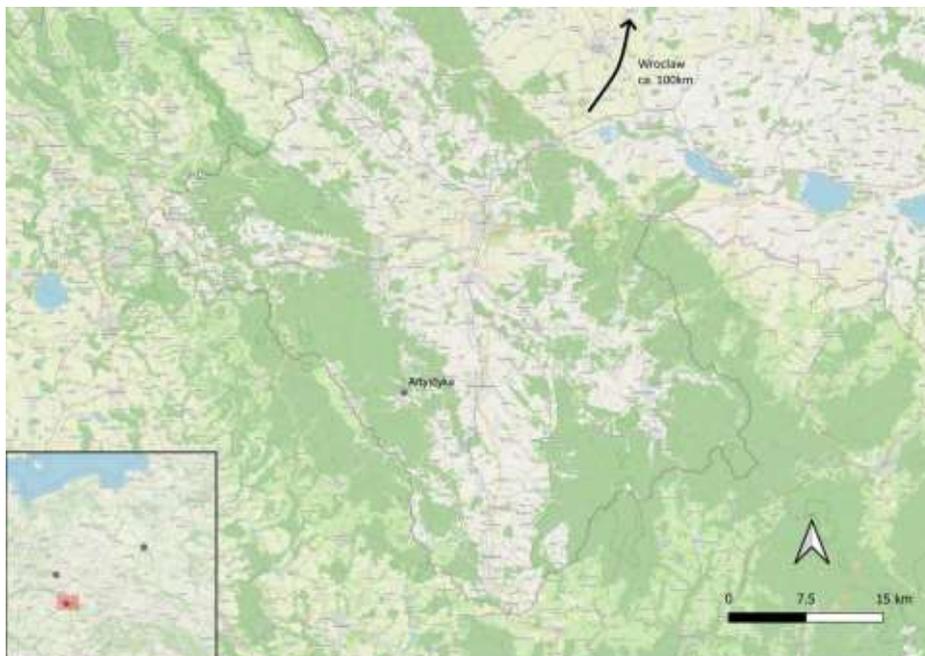


Figure 15. The Klodzko Valley and the location of Artystyka

Source: own, basemap: Open Street Map

The Klodzko Valley, just as the rest of the Lower Silesian voviodeship, is today located in Poland, but historically was also part of other political entities. What is relevant for the current context is that prior to the World War II, the region was part of Germany and it became Polish in the process of border shifts that followed the end of the WWII. While this transition is surely not the only factor here, it is a good reference point for analysing the processes of depopulation that have had a significant influence on the current situation of the region. The comparison of the demographic data from the pre-War (19th and the first

four decades of the 20th century) with the post-War period (since 1945) shows that the number of inhabitants decreased in each village; for 70% of them the by more than 50%, and for 16% by more than 90% (Latocha, 2017). At the turn of the 21st century, however, some symptoms of socio-economic and demographic renewal were observed: in some villages the trend of depopulation was halted or even reversed, there was an increase in the issued permits for house construction, old houses started being renovated, new touristic infrastructure was constructed and some new civil society organizations were established. The processes of local renewal were, however, associated mostly with non-agricultural functions as housing (sometimes temporal) and tourism were the dominant functions of the spatial redevelopment initiatives (Latocha, 2013).

Artystyka is an example of such redevelopment of a former, abandoned farm into an agri-touristic facility. It is located in Nowa Bystrzyca, a village inhabited by 277 persons and located ca. 5 km west of the municipality seat, the town of Bystrzyca Klodzka (ca. 10 000 residents). Nowa Bystrzyca is located already in Bystrzyckie Mountains weaving at between 380-580m a.s.l. along the road from Bystrzyca Klodzka to the Spalona pass (811 m a.s.l.). In terms of its functional character, Nowa Bystrzyca is not only an agricultural village, but also an industrialized one, as for instance cardboard and furniture are still being produced in the manufactures therein. The village has some basic social infrastructure – a football field, a playing ground, a village cultural centre – as well as a church and a basic grocery store. Access to other types of infrastructures is possible in the town of Bystrzyca Klodzka located 5km down the valley. Artystyka, however, is located at the other end of the village: in fact, it is a bit at its verge, further from its core, as the motivation of the hosts was to seek a slightly secluded place, although still close to the village.

Origin of the practice

Artystyka was established in 2005 by a pair of newcomers from the city of Wrocław just after their graduation from university, where they both had been studying Arts. Already during their studies, they began to look around the Lower Silesia region for a rural house to buy and move to – which in the end took them 2 years. The funds required for such a purchase came from family savings, or in fact, from the savings of their grandmothers who were eagerly supporting Krysia and Kajetan in their vision to find their place in the countryside. The motivation to move out was a combination of several factors: a plan to work as artists (which requires sufficient space for the workshop), a desire to run a creative and community-enriching space, limited financial funds, higher housing prices in Wrocław and a general preference for living close to nature over in the city. At the moment of moving out the idea was to combine locally-embedded agritourism with professional work in ceramics and sculpture. Later on it turned out that the latter did not materialize, at least not as a main source of income – but the initiative turned out to be very successful nonetheless.

The beginnings of the practice were marked by intensive renovation of the house, which was necessary for it to be habitable. One characteristic anecdote from this period told by the hosts is how during the first winter (2005/6), which was remarkably cold, all the neighbors were claiming that after such a difficult start the newcomers will surely give up quickly and move out. The house was in a poor condition, there was no floor (only a hard earthen floor), and the only source of heat was one fireplace in the living room that generate around a small zone of bearable temperatures. To the surprise of the neighbors, the newcomers stayed – but this anecdote illustrates one observation made during the data collection for this case study, namely that the personal traits of the newcomers, such as perseverance in the initial period, play a role in the success or failure of such initiatives.



Figure 2. Organizers of the practice moving to Nowa Bystrzyca in 2005

Source: <https://shoutout.wix.com/so/baNcUEGL4> [Accessed on 31/05/2021]

Actors Involved

The main actors of the practice are the pair – Krystyna and Kajetan – who established the farm and have been running it for the last 16 years. However, just after moving to Nowa Bystrzyca, the newcomers also made some steps towards creating an organizational structure that would help them in taking roots in the local community; together with a group of friends, most of whom were based in Wrocław, they established an Association “Artystyka” that played an important role in the development of the initiative. The establishment of the association is considered a crucial step by the hosts today: without it, it would have been much more difficult – or impossible – to apply for grants and contests addressed to NGOs, provide remuneration for workshop leaders, communicate with local administration etc. Therefore, the members of the initiative – who helped prepare grant applications, co-organized events, etc. – could be considered as supporting actors of the practice.

Although the key role in the practice is played by Krystyna and Kajetan, they have been closely cooperating with various members of the local community who also supported them in various ways. Local library, cultural center in Bystrzyca Klodzka, a regional museum in Klodzko or selected officials from the municipality advised, co-created or promoted the activities undertaken by Artystyka. Hence, these are also considered as supporting actors – although to a lesser extent than the members of the Artystyka Association. The interviews gathered for this case study generally indicate a friendly, open stance towards newcomers; however, we also repeatedly heard that the will and perseverance of Krystyna and Kajetan was exceptional and that it was that factor that helped them find their way around any problems on the way. This suggests that it was the combination of appropriate, friendly reception and the personal motivation of the newcomers that helped establish local connections quickly.

Activities promoted

Since the early days of the practice, the hosts have been organizing a number of social, cultural or artistic activities with and for the local community. While many of them have been organized since 2005, here we will describe three examples of such activities that illustrate the process of taking roots in the local community.

The first example shows how spatially-defined artistic projects can balance local specificity with new perspectives for a mutually-enriching dialogue. In 2009, Krystyna and Kajetan organized an 'exhibition' of art works made by regional artists in the public (and semi-public) spaces of Bystrzyca Klodzka. The initiative was called 'Secret spaces of the town' because the works were 'hidden' in the urban tissue of the town – and local youth residents were the guides showing visitors around this open-space exhibition. Sometimes it was a local square, sometimes an inner yard – in any case, each work was referring to a selected aspect of the local context (as interpreted by the artists) and a person who would like to discover them would need a guide from the local community. The residents engaged in the initiative quickly and durably; as Krystyna explains, some residents spontaneously helped in preparing the works, senior residents soon started to keep an eye on the works from their windows or when sitting at benches nearby and the adolescents-guides were inviting tourists they met in the city – 'come and see something cool!' – even a couple of months later (the works were kept there, albeit some of them got destroyed, and one even stolen). There are probably a few factors at play here, but still the initiative was considered very successful by all the persons who referred to it in our interviews. Another consequence of the project was that in the following year one of the editions of art biennale in Wroclaw took place in Bystrzyca Klodzka as its organizers had been inspired by what they saw in Bystrzyca Klodzka a year earlier. The organizers invited i.a. the hosts of Artystyka to work as 'local curators' in order to represent local actors in the process; nonetheless, tensions appeared as some artists proposed works or performances that were considered as arrogant by local residents. Krystyna and Kajetan had a difficult, mediating role in that tensions, but they were able to 'take the side' of the local community thus legitimizing their role as local representatives in the eyes of the community. This case also proves that the same type of activity – an artistic intervention in the town – can yield different results in the same community depending on

the approach taken by organizers. ‘Soft’ aspects such as communication style, sensitivity to the context or symbolic appraisal of the organizers can be decisive in such case – and the hosts of Artystyka seem to have been able to navigate these challenging waters successfully. The second example of a locally-embedded initiative that helped Artystyka take roots in the community is a 6-month series of workshops called ‘A three-faced woman’ organized for women from the area in 2011. The idea behind this project came from Krystyna and another member of the Artystyka Association – a female psychologist – who wanted to create a space for reflection, development and dialogue of local women in different sphere of their lives: personal, professional and relational. While the content and form was with the help of a few other persons from the Association, the content and form of the workshops was prepared with local women in mind. As one participant recalls (PL2C / int. 4), the women who joined the workshops came from very different backgrounds: it was a possibility to meet persons whom they might have had hard time meeting otherwise, understand each other’s perspectives (e.g. a woman who works at a job with a woman who works at home), discuss one’s needs vis-à-vis cultural demands, and create conditions for a sisterhood instead of competition. The workshops lasted six months and seem to introduce a novel, feminist perspective into the region where this perspective had been marginal or non-existing. According to the interviewed participant, the workshops helped her realize that her understanding of her role in the society had been shaped by the patriarchal culture – and this was the first step towards freeing oneself from the demands that such a culture had placed on her. Moreover, the workshops left a long-lasting trace in the region: in 2016 and 2020, when the Polish government, respectively, attempted to and introduced draconian anti-abortion law, some of the women who had first met at the workshops in 2011 formed the backbone of local Women’s Strike (*Strajk Kobiet*), i.e. the movement of resistance against these regulations (and against the patriarchal culture of Poland in general). Although the protests of the Women’s Strike in 2020 were the largest since 1989 in Poland, they concentrated mostly in large cities; hence, organizing a local protest in Klodzko was even more demanding, as there were fewer protesters and the persecution by local police and authorities was even more fierce. Nevertheless, the bonds developed at the workshops organized in 2011 turned out to be strong enough to lay foundations for organizing the protest in these adverse conditions (which is confirmed by the fact that a group of women

who had met at the workshops continued to see each other in the months following it). Yet another long-lasting effect of organizing the workshops was that one of the organizers from the Artystyka Association continued to cooperate with a local NGO afterwards as a result of forging local bonds during the organization of the workshops.

The third, final example of a project that combines novel perspectives with the respect for the existing context are workshops on the preparation of cosmetic from local ingredients organized regularly at the Artystyka farm. While the first two examples were related to social or cultural issues, this one illustrates how the practice approaches the environmental context of the area. The idea behind the workshop is very simple: preparing hand-made cosmetics from locally available plants (Fig. 3). This simple idea is, however, a result of the approach taken by the organizers who do not want to create another 'generic' slow-life agri-tourism; rather, they try to respect the environmental context of the area where they live. The advantage of such an approach is that the participants are encouraged not only to get to know the local context more consciously, but also to develop knowledge about local plants and their practical uses. As a result, local vernacular knowledge and external needs of the participants are combined in order to find new uses for the plants from the region.



Figure 3. Searching for ingredients during the cosmetics workshops

Source: <https://www.artystyka.eu> [Accessed on 31/05/2021]

In general, Artystyka organizes many more types of events than the three described in more detail above. Bread making, yoga, responsible fashion, kung fu, tai-chi or mindfulness are other themes of the workshops taking place at the farm. While these workshops are mostly (but not exclusively) attended by visitors from outside the area, there are also a number of events addressed directly to the local community such as clothes swaps, concerts or community events. Artystyka also made an attempt at creating a 'forest kindergarten', i.e. organized classes for children from the area. A few families joined the initiative, although in the end it lasted only one season because parents had diverging visions of how the classes should look (which, however, is often the case with such projects).

Food and ecotourism

In terms of the 'agri' part of agri-tourism, Artystyka is focusing rather on local, small-scale production for their own needs based on permaculture principles. The rationale behind food production in this case is to have some fresh, high-quality ingredients for the meals prepared for the guests staying at Artystyka. Although the organizers do not want to make food production a part of Artystyka's educational programme, it seems that it plays such a role to some extent as the garden attracts attention of the visitors due to its experimental character. An example of that is the Walipini greenhouse (Fig. 4): a partly-underground greenhouse that allows for extending the season in the climatic conditions of this mountainous area.



Figure 4. The Walipini greenhouse at Artystyka

Source: <https://shoutout.wix.com/so/baNcUEGL4> [Accessed on 31/05/2021]

Even if ‘showcasing’ the experiments in food production is not their explicit goal, the hosts of Artystyka clearly place ecological awareness building among the visitors high on their agenda. A study of Polish ecologically-oriented agri-tourism farms conducted by Barwicka (2019), who assessed accommodation facilities in Poland defining themselves as ecotourism against various criteria of ‘ecological tourism’, showed that Artystyka was the closest to the model eco-tourism facility of this type in Poland. There are many ways in which Artystyka encourages their guests to think and live with consideration given to environmental issues: reducing water consumption (all the water comes from on-site wells), providing vegetarian or vegan meals only, composting (and, obviously, segregating other types of waste), pointing the attention to the impact of cosmetics ingredients on the water cycle (grey water is cleaned on-site in a biological plant), generating heat (thermal solar collectors and a wood-gasifier installation) or explaining the role of ducks kept at the farm in order to keep snail populations in check. While such knowledge might be obvious for rural dwellers, the urban-based guests explain that it is vital for them to be exposed to such practices. Furthermore, they confirm that such experiences leave a mark on them, as they change their behaviour towards more ‘ecological’ after coming back to their urban lives. Even if the practices of the rural life are not directly applicable in their cities, the general attitude towards resource conservation can be altered – which then translates into specific practices relevant to the urban context. Finally, we also spoke to some guests who at some point after their visit (or visits) decided to move to the countryside themselves – often to the Klodzko valley too – and they report to have been inspired in a large part by their visits in Artystyka.

Synergies and networking

The role of Artystyka in creating synergies and networks can be considered in (at least) two spatial perspectives: local and supra-local.

In terms of local networking, Artystyka plays a role in the social and cultural life of the area, contributing to establishing local networks in the process. Organization of the workshops (especially the 'Three-faced woman' workshop that lasted for 6 months), events (e.g. the 'Hidden spaces of the town' event that engaged many actors), exhibitions in local museums or community activities (such as clothes swaps or the forest kindergarten) are all examples of activities that helped in developing local networks and identity. We have no data related to the exact impacts of these actions; however, the interviewees from the region did mention that Artystyka – a practice that originated beyond the 'local' – helped them in establishing new *local* relationships.

Artystyka has also been an important node for the processes of supra-local networking, not least because of its 'double' life: the hosts were still keeping relations with their former place of residence while developing new ones in the Klodzko Valley. This process enabled establishing various regional networks of people who either visited Artystyka, took part in the workshops or cooperated with them in the organizational work. Some examples were already mentioned: members of the Artystyka Association who then began working with local NGOs, artists from Wrocław who organized art events in Bystrzyca Klodzka or guests who decided to move to the region after visiting Artystyka. At some point, Artystyka even became a movie set for a Polish cinematic production, with Nowa Bystrzyca as the background for the story. Over the 16 years of their activity, there were indeed many occasions for supra-local actors to get engaged in one way or another in Nowa Bystrzyca or the Klodzko valley.

Policies and institutional support

The first entities that the organizers contacted upon arrival to Nowa Bystrzyca, were: local library, Snieznik Local Development Fund (a regional NGO collecting funds for local development projects), two museums operating in the region and municipality officials. Simultaneously, the organizers set up the association 'Artystyka' together with a group of friends from Wroclaw, and to some extent from other places, which played a key role in applying for local development grants provided by national and international bodies.

In most of their early development, Artystyka worked in close cooperation with local authorities. The relation is described as generally positive, since the municipality was open to the projects such as the 'Secret spaces of the town' in Bystrzyca Klodzka, which required consent to work with heritage objects of the town. One respondent from a local cultural institution mentioned that the bureaucracy of the local administration was a barrier to some extent; however, in her/his view the perseverance of the organizers allowed them to overcome it.

Where the respondents did face a barrier, however, was in their applications for funds from the EU disposed by regional and national agencies. The hosts recall numerous unsuccessful attempts to acquire funds that could support the renovation of the farm buildings from the Agency for Modernization and Restructurization of Farming within a programme that at that time had a 2% success rate. Further formal barriers appeared when it turned out that even though the hosts were running an agri-touristic farm, they could not receive support for its development because one cannot be at the same time an artist and a farmer (for reasons related to two separate pension systems for persons officially registered as artists and farmers). The respondents report a strong feeling of frustration due to the misunderstanding of their specific situation by the agency officials and a huge amount of time dedicated to preparing documentation in line with the unclear demands of the agency. After three years of such attempts, the couple gave up and decided to take a regular loan for the renovation – and this is now one of the reasons they shifted their focus from social animation activities onto the eco-tourism business they are running.

Impact and perspectives

The impact and future perspectives of Artystyka need to be considered against the goals that the organizers set themselves. The idea behind the practice is not as much to do something exceptional, have a thriving business, or instigate some particular changes in the area; it is rather to simply live a good life. The hosts of Artystyka have their idea of a good life and social activity, ecotourism or 'slow life' are part of that; however, these are not really goals in themselves but rather elements of a wider vision of one's life.

For this reason, this practice can be considered both as a good, promising one, as well as a rather 'normal' one in the sense that it does not aim to achieve any specific, concrete objective. Moreover, in terms of the organizational structure, an agri-touristic farm is a very frequent type of initiative of rural newcomers both in Poland and other parts of Europe. However, it seems that this case illustrates how such a practice, driven by personal motivations, can be successfully embedded in the local context, and thus bring numerous benefits for local development.

With time, the emphasis of Artystyka owners shifted from local activism towards running the business in a 'healthy' way that secures sufficient free time for personal and family life of the owners. The initial period of establishing local relations can be thus also considered as a temporal approach that serves as a basis for embedding the initiative in the local context. From this perspective, one could think of an evolution of the practice – from a 'niche', towards a fully developed, active practice into a subsequent stage of 'slowing down'. However, there are also alternative scenarios: some of our interviewers marked that it was generally possible to make a living off the social or cultural projects (for which, however, professionalization of the Artystyka Association would be required) and so, theoretically, it was possible for the practice to develop more into a non-governmental, local organization acquiring funds from grants rather than into a business based on the income from tourists (even if environmentally- and socially-embedded). It is of course a question of what the newcomers want, but in theory such a practice could continue working along these lines.

Nevertheless, the model chosen by the owners of Artystyka seems to be both viable and beneficial for the local community. First of all, the practice saved a run-down farmhouse and

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a barn and renovated it with respect to the cultural context, but with adding or replacing some elements in order for it to be functional today. Then, there were manifold direct impacts for the local community – knowledge generation, awareness building, skill development, etc. – of all the activities undertaken by Artystyka since 2016 (described earlier in text). Some indirect impacts also occur: establishing relationships in both local and supra-local scale, attracting new residents to the region, promoting the region, or contributing to cultural shifts or innovations (as exemplified by the Women’s Strike).

The main factor for this success behind these activities seems to be an ability of Artystyka to combine honest respect for the local context with a willingness to introduce new perspectives that genuinely improve the life of the community. Of course, there were a number of ‘hidden’ factors at play here: for instance, having access to initial funds needed to buy the house was of crucial importance for them to start in the first place. Other characteristics, such as a relative openness of local authorities combined with the perseverance of the newcomers, access to competences needed to acquire external funding (made possible by the Artystyka Association), or the cooperation with local actors such as the Snieznik Local Development Fund were instrumental to the success. It seems that all these elements are generally reproducible or existing in other contexts, although the human factor (i.e. personal traits) is to a large extent beyond the influence of any policies or authorities. Other factors, however, are – and building on them as well as reducing barriers describe in the case study will most probably help newcomers that decide to run an agri-touristic farm in taking roots in the local community with social, environmental as well as economic benefits.



Figure 5. The farmhouse in 1926 and today

Source: https://www.facebook.com/artystykaeu-116613731689119/photos/832907033_393115 [Accessed on 31/05/2021])

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Annex 1: The list of interviews

Code	Role	Date	Place
PL2C/Int.1	practice leader	15.03.2021	Nowa Bystrzyca
PL2C/Int.2	local NGO representative	18.03.2021	phone
PL2C/Int.3	local NGO representative	19.03.2021	Wójtowice
PL2C/Int.4	local museum representative	05.05.2021	phone
PL2C/Int.5	local library director	14.05.2021	phone
PL2C/Int.6	community centre director	04.05.2021	phone
PL2C/Int.7	workshops participant	05.05.2021	MS Teams
PL2C/Int.8	workshops participant	27.04.2021	MS Teams
PL2C/Int.9	workshops participant	05.04.2021	phone
PL2C/ Int.10	local administration representative	20.03.2021	phone
PL2C/ Int.11	local cultural facility representative	09.04.2021	phone
PL2C/ Int.12	member of the 'Artystyka' Association	09.04.2021	MS Teams
PL2C/ Int.13	practice leaders' university colleagues	29.03.2021	MS Teams
PL2C/ Int.14	guest	04.05.2021	MS Teams
PL2C/ Int.15	guest	30.04.2021	Wrocław
PL2C/ Int.16	guest	28.04.2021	phone
PL2C/ Int.17	workshops participant	29.03.2021	phone
PL2C/ Int.18	guest	27.03.2021	MS Teams
PL2C/ Int.19	academic expert	29.03.2021	phone
PL2C/ Int.20	academic expert	30.04.2021	phone

Table 1- Interviews