

Appendix 5: Zabkowicki County (Poland, NC5)

Organising partner:	University of Wroclaw	Innovation Type
Practice:	Newcomer artisans (Hungary, HU10C)	
Practice context:	Hajdú-Bihar County and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties - Predominantly urban	
Confrontation context:	Zabkowicki County (LAU1 5020324)- Predominantly urban	
Workshop location:	Nowina, Zabkowicki County	
Date:	November 3rd 2021	

Summary

Zabkowicki County is a LAU1 unit in the Southern part of the Lower Silesia region. While it is smaller than NUTS3 regions where the Hungarian case study was conducted, and slightly more rural in its character, it faces a similar phenomenon as the Hajdú-Bihar County and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties – negative migration rates with some nodes where nonetheless rural newcomers move to. One of these locations in Zabkowicki County is Nowina, where this confrontation workshop was organized. Participants expressed interest in the insights gathered in the Hungarian case and complemented this view with their experiences. A key issue they brought up is the role of early newcomers in paving the way for subsequent persons to move to a rural area. Other issues cover: pooling the limited resources of individual villages in the area in order to gain critical mass for e.g. markets or fairs organisation, access to broadband, nurturing connections with urban areas, and securing access to markets and land for artisanal activities. Future actions of the participants will therefore be focused mostly on these issues.

Context

The confrontation area for this practice is the LAU 1 (5020324) Zabkowicki County located within the Lower Silesia NUTS2 region. Zabkowicki County is a predominantly rural area, with a level of urbanization at 45%, population density of 80 persons/km² and more than 70% of its area devoted to

agriculture (CSO, 2021). Being a LAU1 unity, it is obviously smaller than the Hungarian NUTS3 regions where the practice was studied – i.e. the Hajdú-Bihar County and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties – and slightly more rural (45% urbanization rate compared to 54% and 80% for the Hungarian regions and the slightly lower population density of 80 persons per km² compared to 85 and 93 for Hungary). Nevertheless, it shares important migratory characteristics with that of the Hungarian regions: the net migration of the county has been consistently negative in the 25 years (Fig. 1), but, as in the case of the Hungarian case study, there are individual villages and areas that do not suffer from negative migration rates. Therefore, the confrontation region of the Zabkowicki County provides an opportunity not only to inspire local communities to follow the promising practice, but also to actually confront experiences of better faring localities in the regions against the background of the less successful region.

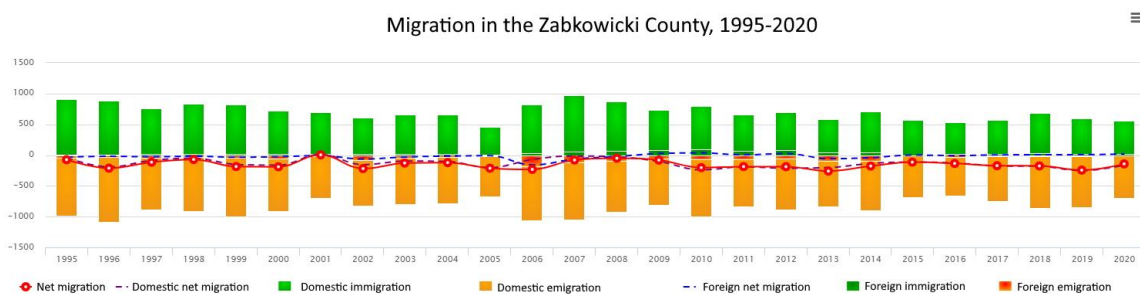


Fig. 1 Migration in the Zabkowicki County, 1995-2020 (source: https://www.polskawliczbach.pl/powiat_zabkowicki, based on the data of the Central Statistical Office of Poland, GUS)

One of such locations where there are some signs of immigration amid a depopulating area is Nowina, a small village with ca. 70 residents where the confrontation workshop was organized. In the village, there are already several newcomers, some of them engaged in crafts; an experimental theatre operates in the village and a few guesthouses that also sell local food. Nonetheless, the local community was very interested in the Hungarian case study and expressed their will to join the workshop, which in the end attracted 14 persons (mostly the residents of the village and newcomers) out of the approx. 70 who live in the village.



Fig. 2. The village of Nowina and announcements of the local experimental theatre (source: own)

Results

Acceptance and interest in implementing the practice

The participants of the workshops in Nowina, some of whom were newcomers themselves, expressed clear acceptance and interest in implementing promising practices related to how newcomer artisans settle down and develop their activities in a new rural place. The role of newcomers in rural development, both in terms of social and economic impacts, and especially by means of engagement in local crafts and free professions, was recognized and in fact sparked enthusiasm among some of the participants since it was the path that they themselves had chosen. Other residents were also keen to understand how the arrival of newcomers takes place in other, promising regions, and how to harness this potential for rural development of their area.

Identified critical factors related to the implementation of the practice in the context

Although many issues related to how newcomers can take roots in a new place were discussed, there is one that was considered especially important for the residents of Nowina: there always needs to be someone who starts the process. By this it was meant that a process of immigration of newcomers into a specific place is benefitting from a snowball effect, whereby early newcomers pave the way for other newcomers who then can more easily join the new community. The most important reason for that process is that early newcomers are necessarily in the position of showcasing why and how new residents can bring benefits to the local community members, which is often a difficult process due to possible misunderstanding and tensions that newcomers can face. If early newcomers are able to overcome that, then they create easier conditions for the following migrants to be accepted more easily; and they can also directly help new newcomers as “guides” within the community who introduce them to the local context. This was clearly emphasized as a key factor in that process; other issues are discussed below.

Key issues and barriers for implementing the innovative practice in the context

- Maintaining connections with earlier place of residence

The Hungarian case study has shown how the bonds that a (potential) newcomer has with their earlier place of living hinder the decision to move to the countryside. This barrier was also brought up in the confrontation, although in this case the newcomers explained the connections they had had with urban areas as a factor of *success*. Most businesses run by newcomers are based on these links: for instance, guesthouses that are visited mostly by urbanites; workshops that are joined by urbanites too; crafts that are sold in the city, since

this is where most demand for such products is. In other words, while connections with a city can be a barrier, they can also be decisive when someone has already moved and is trying to find ways to support oneself from the new type of work.

- Access to markets for artisanal products

A related issue is the overall access to markets for artisanal products and services (e.g. workshops). The experiences of newcomers show that it is mostly, although not exclusively, visitors from outside who purchase such products. The issue of access to markets is therefore a crucial factor: without it, the prospects for artisanal production are bleak. However, simultaneously the potential of local residents in purchasing e.g. artisanal food should be explored too.

- Limited resources in a single village

Artisanal newcomers in villages such as Nowina face significant barriers due to the small size of the community (ca. 70 persons). Many initiatives are not able to sustain themselves on the basis of such limited population size. For instance, Organising fairs in the village (in order to improve access to markets) just on the basis of its produce would be probably unsuccessful. Hence, there is a need to combine resources with neighbouring communities and e.g. organize one, broadly promoted by all communities' food market that would shift its location e.g. monthly or yearly.

- Broadband internet connection

A key limit for many newcomer artisans is access to broadband internet connection needed for e.g. selling products on-line, promoting and Organising subscription to workshops or providing accommodation reservation tools. Most newcomers agreed that even if the production is local and traditional, sale and communication channels are not.

- Early reception of newcomers in the village

How newcomers will be received in the early stages of the process of moving is considered by respondents as crucial for their capability of successfully blending into the local community. A person moving to the new place faces significant challenges, and hence there is a significant role to be played by the local community and authorities in supporting newcomers at this point. Several strategies are possible: for instance, providing a 'starting kit' with basic information and contacts, Organising welcome events or simply visiting the new neighbour might often help in unexpected ways.

- Value and worldview gap between newcomers and residents

A significant barrier to the integration of newcomers occurs when there is a clear ideological split resulting from the prevalence of conservative vs. progressive values. Although this should not be generalized, residents argued that newcomers are usually more progressive, which can cause tensions to occur. Poland is especially relevant here as these tensions began occurring more and more even between those newcomers that had already been living in the village for years and other local residents with more conservative views. Hence, this process is problematic also when there are in fact no new newcomers.

- Access to land

Finally, access to land poses – expectedly – a significant barrier to those newcomers who need land (especially: farmland) to undertake their projects. Residents mentioned that land is difficult to buy, regulations as to required conditions for being able to purchase farmland often unclear, and prices – high.

Identified measures and actors that need to be involved to overcome the obstacles and succeed in the implementation of the practice

- Establishing and promoting local markets for artisanal products

As it was already alluded to, local fairs or markets for artisanal products, (co)-organized and promoted by local and regional authorities (including within urban audiences) would be of significant help for the newcomer artisans to support themselves. At the same time, authorities can try and help in reaching on-line markets, for instance by helping in setting one, centralized local portal with artisanal products.

- Supporting early newcomers and their subsequent help for next newcomers

Local authorities and, more broadly, communities, should also establish ways in which newcomers would be welcomed and encouraged to integrate with the local community (which they often are willing to do but might not know how to best do it). A welcome meeting, a starter's kit and a symbolic gift, or similar initiatives would help in overcoming that barrier. Actors who can engage in that process could range from individuals through local businesses and NGOs to representatives of local authorities.

- Enabling better access to land for newcomers

More broadly, local, regional and national authorities should improve access to land for newcomers, especially those who need land for the activities (and food production has been shown to be an important aspect of artisanal production with significant potential). Other types of infrastructures that support access to less tangible issues related to land (knowledge, networks, etc.) should complement access to physical land itself.

- Broadband connection

Local, regional and national authorities should provide broadband connection and infrastructure that could help artisan newcomers in their sales, communication and promotion. This can take place, for instance, in rural hubs that would simultaneously help entrepreneurs and provide other services that would be of help to local residents. (An inspiration can come e.g. from the GrowRemote project examined by the Irish team as one of the promising practices in WP5).

Further innovative ideas to foster rural regeneration and development in the context

- Local food and other trends related to the quality of life as bases for artisanal work
As in the case of the other confrontation, the importance of local food was often brought up in the discussion on how artisanal produce can help in regenerating rural areas. Perhaps food is not innovative, but high quality products are clearly more and more demanded, and therein is the potential for artisanal newcomers to find a solid foundation for their rural life. Other trends broadly related to the quality of life also provide possibilities for artisanal production to flourish.

Lessons learned and recommendations

A couple of lessons and recommendations can be drawn from this confrontation. Generally, even in areas with negative migration rates there can nonetheless be nodes that concentrate newcomers to the area, as is the case in Nowina. Such newcomers that intend to engage in artisanal work face numerous barriers, and local authorities do possess tools to respond to most of them. It is especially important to provide support for early newcomers, who can then use their experiences to guide subsequent immigrants, and also to support newcomers at early stages after they come to the new place, since this is when the support is needed most. Again, there are several ways in which local authorities can do it (described earlier).

The residents of Nowina have clearly used the confrontation workshop as a means of reflecting on their own community. The discussions in brainstorming groups and the focus group were intense, and helped the participants to plan their next steps. Especially the idea of pooling resources with other villages seems to have caught traction and might be exploited in the future. Moreover, joint reflection on the role of early newcomers have contributed to even more integration within the community. One problem that remains unaddressed and pressing, however, is a growing gap between conservative and progressive residents of the village. This, however, is a problem common throughout communities in Poland, both in rural and urban areas and seems to be deeper than the newcomers/resident division.

References

Central Statistical Office in Poland (CSO) (2021). *Bank Danych Lokalnych / Powiat Żabkowicki* [Local Database for the Żabkowicki County]. Available at: <https://bdl.stat.gov.pl/BDL/start>

Contributors:

Workshop Facilitation: Sylwia Doźbłasz, Krzysztof Janc, Robert Skrzypczyński (UWR)

Reporting: Sylwia Doźbłasz, Krzysztof Janc, Andrzej Raczyk, Robert Skrzypczyński (UWR)