

INVITATION TO



COLLOQUIUM 2008

Eco social farms in Pomurje: A proper device to keep social integration of (rural) community during rapid social change?

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Participants: local actors, guest fellows IAS-STS (IFZ) Graz, invited guests

Host: volunteer association MOZAIK, Murska Sobota, Slovenia

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MOZAIK COLLOQUIUM 2008

Eco social farms in Pomurje: A proper device to keep social integration of (rural) community during rapid social change?

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Sponsors: Mozaik, University Ljubljana, IAS-STG (IFZ) Graz



Univerza v Ljubljani



Rural community development by enhancing innovative micro initiatives on maintaining social cohesion: introduction to colloquium

Anton Kramberger, Alojz Kavaš, Goran Milošević

During liberal episodes of globalization, traditional societies usually experience an accelerated path of (neo-schumpeterian) creative destruction. The processes of nivelizing more salient differences across regions is accompanied by societal des-integration and fragmentation, often segregated in economic, social or geographical terms. One can always find those less adaptive regions and local communities non capable to compete fully with others.

In Slovenia, a region with most accumulated developmental problems seems to be Pomurje (the region around the Mura river), a rural, most north-east part of the country. Not only it was less developed already within the former socialist Yugoslavia, it exhibits similar characteristics even nowadays¹. Some signs of success could not replace a general picture of under-development.

During transition to capitalism, the former larger manufacturing firms of Pomurje (textile, food production ...) employing mainly low-skilled (female) labour force were destroyed and replaced by smaller private firms, with less jobs. A majority of casual jobs were thus cancelled out in all sectors but in agriculture, construction and perhaps public administration. Workers are displaced, they need re-training, many of them (above age of 50) are either retired, on waiting lists, pushed to (all kinds of) self-employment, involuntarily unemployed (officially, every fifth active person is unemployed) or simply non-active. Many small farms were abolished and the land was sold to just few big private farm(er)s. Youth strive to achieve the highest possible (public) education to avoid rather bad non-standard jobs that are available - even though the region has the least tertiary students per 1000 population, ie. only 43 - and then tend to emigrate elsewhere, for better life chances. By this, the pace of ageing (due to a strong demographic decline in Slovenia) is doubled in Pomurje.

What to do as to reverse these rather sad trends of peripheral devastation, depopulation and socio-economic destruction in still rural Pomurje? With nearly no creative forces left there to support a desired recovery? To eventually catch up, with less social deprivation and exclusion?

Obviously, (welfare) state interventions are not enough to maintain a needed social cohesion on satisfactory level. They rely too heavily on distant, passive sets of impersonal social interventions (state benefits, allowances, subsidies; formal acts of social protection, occasional, limited and temporary incentives; slow repairing of bad traffic – a rather delayed investments into local infrastructure is under way). A general lack of personal motivation to stay (among youth) or to start something meaningful or promising (for elderly) is significant, especially among the vulnerable - 'wounded' individuals who only hardly cope with so many problems.

Initiative of the MOZAIK association – empowering most vulnerable individuals

Is there a way out of troubles beyond two most popular alternative: either a total, global liberal (market) break-through or an old-fashioned, rigid and nation-wide concertated corporate 'slow-motion'? Members of most vulnerable groups within Pomurje periphery are under strong pressure - each stream of the above alternative make them easily to be forgotten: disabled

¹ In 2004, gross domestic product per capita was the highest in the Central Slovenian region with capital Ljubljana (EUR 18 786), while it was the lowest in the Pomurska region (EUR 9 072). In comparison to the average of the EU-25 (=100) measured by GDP per capita in purchasing power parities the Central Slovenian region had index 114 and the least developed Pomurska region had index 55 (SORS 2007 – Slovene regions in figures).

people (by nature), on-the-job invalids (ex-workers), people with criminal record (drugs, alcohol, crime), members of ethnic minorities (Roma's people), older single persons etc. (1 to 3% of population). They are too quickly excluded and have quite bad prospects to be included again.

To re-direct at least some of these bad tendencies, a volunteer association MOZAIK was established by some enthusiasts five years ago, with an explicit goal to help the re-integration of the members of most vulnerable social groups of the region. Its activities might be best understood as a civic extension of more rigid state social-care or its rehabilitation programmes.

Currently, the MOZAIK is launching a set of innovative, active projects of social rehabilitation and inclusion, often with the support of public funds. These projects are sensitive to desires and (often) limited capabilities of socially excluded persons. They are highly supported by their families, too (a high share of large households still exists in Pomurje) and on general, they could rely on tolerant, solidary local communities' spirit. For example, one of the central projects tries to attract (and employ) members of most vulnerable social groups into simple gaining activities, especially around the concept of *eco social farms*, rooted in local tradition, community culture and increasing ecological concerns.

Eco social farms are seen as rather innovative institutions - for the working inclusion of people from most vulnerable social groups in the activities of ecological agriculture. Under the supervision, the 'wounded' people first (re)build such farms², then they develop various social, productive and market activities within and around them. The possibilities for the formation of such farms exist in the whole Pomurje region and this enables individual *eco social farms* to be implemented in many local communities. So, by a balanced dispersion of such farms across the whole region they seem to have quite good chances to be well connected into local social networks, share some of the collective social as well as productive and market functions (training, quality standards of production, marketing...). With some *permanent public support* (as they are focused to employ people from the very social margins) they could cope with increasing market pressure and become viable economic subjects on the local (and perhaps wider) market.

AIMS of the meeting and colloquium

Eco social farms network with many modules for animation, training, empowerment and employability (employment) of wounded social groups - is this a rightly conceptualized, well guided and on-time activity for the current region's developmental problems? What are its advantages, its weaknesses? How to share experiences? How strategically best to improve the current initiative? Can a sensitive local development be an effective adaptation mechanism as to counter-balance the unstable global pressure? What local partnership is best to augment dispersed targets of macro policies? Similar cross-border examples, possible generalization?

This colloquium is organized to discuss at least some of these questions. During the visit to Prekmurje, the participants will first be presented main aims of the MOZAIK. Then they will visit few places where *eco social farms* and the related activities (facilities) were already established. In the afternoon discussion, the participants will be asked to share their impressions, expertise and suggestions with other participants of the event, especially with the invited guests, who will shortly present key features of few similar local community developmental projects from elsewhere. About social justice issues in the community shifts from industrial to service society.

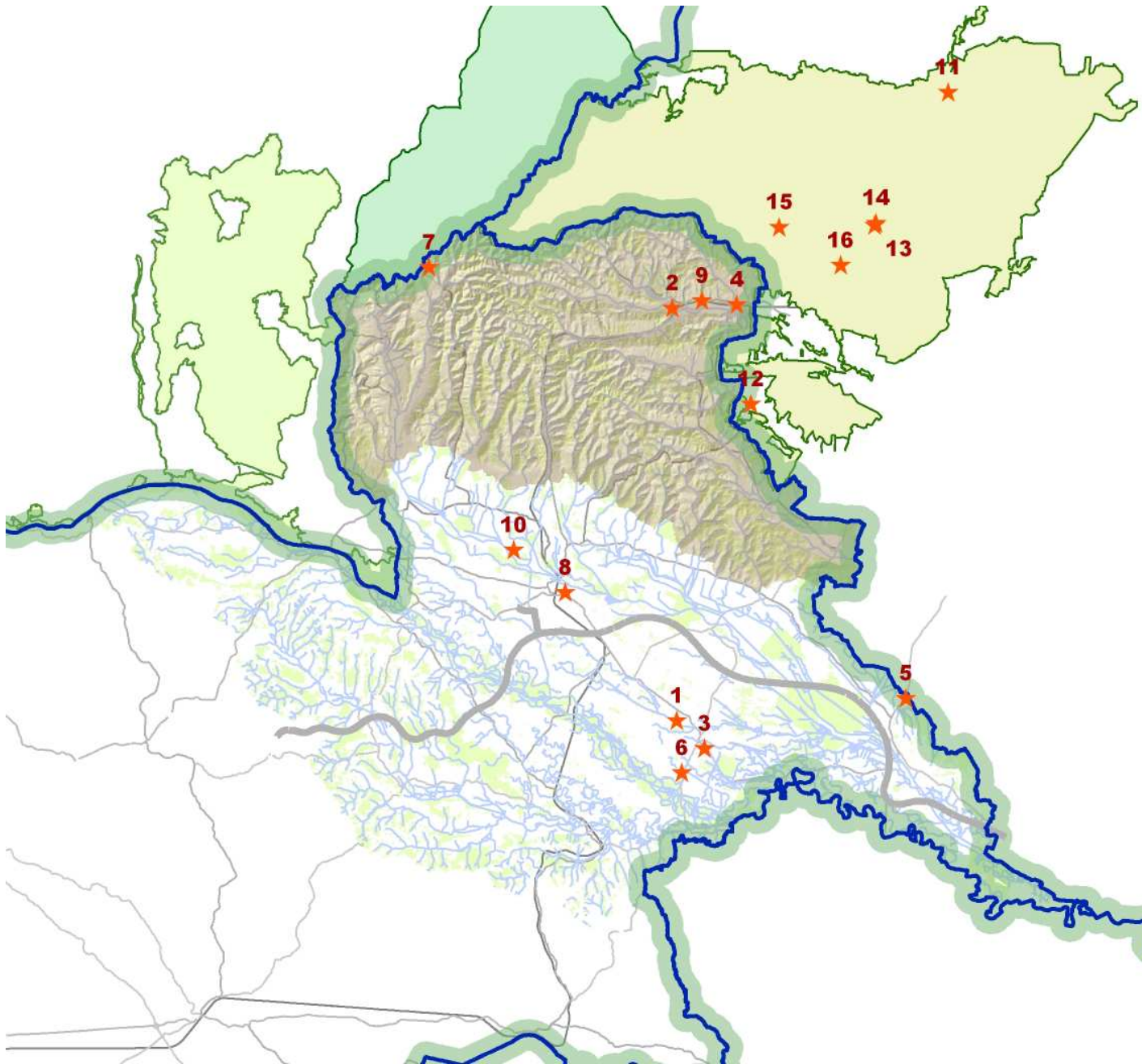
Discussion about this local initiative may bring a better insight into the antithesis between global and local forces (convergence, divergence?) and contribute to a co-operation in near future.

² See picture show of building process: http://www.mozaik-drustvo.si/Ekoloska_Predstavitev.php?id=67278

PRELIMINARY PROGRAM

- ... - 10.00 Travel to Murska sobota (from Graz, Ljubljana, Budapest ...)
- 10.00 - 12.00 **Welcome in Murska Sobota** (place PRIBINOVINA)
- Welcome³, aims of the meeting (Alojz Kavaš, Anton Kramberger)
- MOZAIK: mission & network of eco social farms project (Alojz Kavaš, Goran Milošević)
- Meal for participants*
- Visit of PRIBINOVINA, eco-food production unit
- 12.00 - 13.00 **Visit of the Mura river in natural environment**
- Visit of water mill on Mura river (place *Ižakovci*)
- Visit of Eco-center SVIT, eco-food production unit (place *Bistrica*)
- 13.00 - 14.00 **Visit of traditional Pomurje village**
- Traditional villages, typical houses - thatched cottages
- 14.00 - 16.00 **Visit of eco-social farms (Mozaik activities)**
- Place no. 1 (*Krplivnik*, half-failed example so far)
- Place no. 2 (*Šalovci*, a successful example)
- 16.00 - 17.00 **Back to Public Library in Murska Sobota** (Session room)
- Meal for participants*
- 17.00 – 19.30 **Colloquium:** Invited lectures and general discussion
- Moderator: Anton Kramberger (University Ljubljana, Slovenia)*
- Introduction (Andrej Horvat, Murska Sobota, Slovenia)
- Integrated rural development (Gusztáv Nemes, Academy Budapest, Hungary)
- Community Culture (Igor Bahovec, University Ljubljana, Slovenia)
- Supporting remote villages (Narayanan Kulathuramaiyer, Univ. Malaysia Sarawak)
- Discussion**
- Concluding remarks (A. Kavaš, G. Getzinger)
- 20.00 – 22.00 **Common dinner** (place: restaurant in *Brezovci*)
- Travel back home

³ Every participant will receive: map of the region, booklet with abstracts for the afternoon discussion, etc.



Picture of Pomurje with some of the places of Mosaic activities – we will visit some of these.



Presentation of the volunteer organisation Mozaik

Alojz Kavaš, Goran Milošević

Association Mozaik actively intervenes in the field of social inclusion of the most vulnerable social groups and contributes to a higher quality of life in the local community. We aim to help the socially most vulnerable people, therefore we strive to improve their qualifications for work and in this manner open the way to employment in activities where they can prove their abilities.

In modern times, marked by the decline of a social state and welfare, the strongest development paradigm that is put into force is the concept of globalisation. It originates from the presumption that it is necessary to develop high technologies and in this manner take part in the globalisation process. By these means, the world is unifying and discriminating local characteristics, especially social groups that are not able to equally participate in the exceptionally competitive global environment. The vulnerable social groups are therefore marginalized and slowly excluded from all important social activities.

We think that in order to achieve a stable long-term development (the imperative of which will also be the employment and social inclusion of all the groups of the population), it is necessary for the regions to develop complementary development strategies and activities that will take into consideration specific natural, cultural and human resources that the regions have at their disposal.

We wish to implement a strategy of social inclusion of vulnerable social groups on the basis of their training and employment in the developmental perspective activities that are connected with ecology and a natural and cultural heritage of the Pomurje region. In order to achieve this goal we are developing innovative programmes that will enable an increase of working qualifications of the members of vulnerable groups and their employment in activities in the field of ecological agriculture, ecological foodstuffs processing, traditional building, ecological tourism and environmental care.

In regard to the goals we set, the activities of the project are developing on four levels:

1. Programmes of working training

Programmes for working training of vulnerable social groups are prepared and executed by experts of individual fields that we have included in the sector of social ecology in the Pomurje region (traditional building, ecological agriculture, ecological foodstuffs processing and environmental care). The emphasis of the training is on the teaching of practical work in a real environment with short theoretical bases.

In the preparation of the programme, we have included a wide spectrum of experts from the local environment (schools with adapted programmes, centres for social work, non-governmental organisations), national institutions (Institute for rehabilitation, Unemployment office, Ministry for labour, family and social affairs, Faculty for social work, Faculty for social sciences), and also some experts and organisations from the neighbouring Austria (Lebenshilfe Bad Radkersburg) and Hungary.

In the past years, individual thematic workshops from the field of ecological agriculture, traditional building and ecological foodstuffs processing have been concluded and more than 50

members of vulnerable social groups have been included. In 2005, we have begun with the preparation and the pilot execution of concluded programmes of training for work in social ecology that include special modules for all four areas we are working on and extra modules of mentor training for psychosocial assistance of people from vulnerable social groups.

2. Promotion and introduction of new forms of employment and work

Training has its meaning in a permanent employment and work. For this purpose, with our project, we wish to develop alternative forms of employment in activities such as: ecological agriculture, seed trading, processing and marketing of eco foodstuffs, traditional building (natural materials; straw, wood, clay; building with non-baked bricks), wooden products, clay products, flax and linen, straw and birch products, environmental care in regional parks (maintenance of cycling paths, learning paths, water courses), preventing the overgrowing of agricultural land, and similar.

A special part among the introduction of alternative forms of employment is given to the concept development and to the practical introduction of eco social farms as innovative institutions for the working inclusion of people from vulnerable social groups in the activities of ecological agriculture. The possibilities for the formation of such farms exist in the whole Pomurje region and this enables individual eco social farms to connect into a network, share some of the collective functions (training, quality standards, marketing...) and so they become equal economic subjects on the local market.

3. The development of the mentor structure for guiding and psychosocial assistance

We are developing two levels of mentor structure: the first is the level of experts, who are professionally involved in the individual areas of counselling and work within individual non-governmental organisations or in national institutions. They are included in individual programmes within the project and they are always available in the case of need for solving problems.

Their role is mostly to educate a second level of mentors that are directly and daily in contact with the people involved. In the training of second level mentors, people that have been unemployed for longer periods, are also included, because of their specific knowledge and training for work in areas, covered by this project. They have mostly been made redundant because of structural changes in the economy and therefore they have lost the opportunity for a permanent employment.

Mentors of second level are involved, as well as in working training, also in individual workshops for psychosocial assistance of people from vulnerable social groups but they also have a permanent opportunity for individual consultation with experts included in the first level of the mentor network.

4. Development of our own trademark and marketing

The development of our own trademark is based on the fact that permanent employment and social promotion of vulnerable groups is possible only with the marketing of their products and services. We wish therefore to complement our ecological production with the processing and selling of products, above all on the local market but also in tourism, which is one of the declared development opportunities of the region. When developing our own trademark we are above all working on the standardisation of marketing products that will enable a sufficient volume of

production to appear on the market and an opening of new commercial ways (direct sale, on farm sale, supplying schools and public institutions, inclusion in the tourist supply).

The project is financed from different sources. Very important are the donations of EU programmes (Phare cross-border cooperation with Austria and Hungary, Interreg IIIa), donations of ministries and national institutions, donations from local businesses and local communities. We also have to mention the work of the volunteers in the association.

The different phases of the project are concluded wholes with an independent financial construction; but our vision is in the durability of the established activities so we are going to continue by establishing a network of eco social farms and a regional centre for the training and employment of people from vulnerable social groups in social ecology, which will enable sustainable development of the forth set activities.

In conclusion we would like to sum up our goals

- To develop a network of eco social farms that will be devoted to the training and employment of people from vulnerable social groups for the production and processing of ecological products.
- To renovate traditional farms in the most depopulated areas of the region in the context of preservation of traditional rural architecture.
- To invest in joint network production facilities for traditional ways of food processing in the context of renovation of traditional buildings for eco social farming.
- To involve individual farms with interest for ecological production into the network and ensure further employment possibilities for people from our target groups.
- To strengthen the cooperation of farmers in the region in the areas of human resources development joint processing and marketing of the products with higher added value.
- To increase the amount of sown areas for the ecological production of cereals in the region (wheat, spelt, oat and buckwheat).
- To start an ecological fruit and vegetable production (and processing), horse breeding (therapeutic riding) and goat breeding (milk, cheese).
- As well as the possibility of working and living, the farms included in the network will also provide the possibility for sale and supply of the products in the area of ecological tourism.
- We will gradually develop a trademark of ecologically produced products and sell then on the local market within the tourist offer of the region.
- To ensure the conditions for a permanent activity of the network, we will create a regional service for training and employment of people from vulnerable social groups in the activities of ecological agriculture and processing of foodstuffs of local origin.

Photos by Mozaik (left: Building traditional-type house; right: eco-food production)



