



Social Engagement and Rural Newcomers

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ABSTRACT One of the fundamental preconditions for the development of rural areas is the engagement of local citizens. The objective of this paper is to explore the role of social engagement, understood as an important part of civic engagement, in the integration of newcomers in two rural municipalities. By examining two villages with different levels of public activities of social engagement, I observed the role that social engagement can play in integrating newcomers in rural communities. Based on these case studies, conducted in a peripheral Czech region, the findings of this paper underline the importance of public activities of social engagement as one factor preventing fragmentation and alienation within rural communities and in integrating newcomers into existing communities. At the same time, my results also reveal the vanishing rural character of communities with successful approaches to the integration of newcomers.

KEY WORDS Social engagement, newcomers, long-term residents, third places, rural, rurbanisation, Czech Republic

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore the role played by social engagement activities in the process of integration of newcomers in existing rural communities. I also study the most important preconditions for the successful development of social engagement in rural areas. Therefore, my research questions are as follows: *How does social engagement contribute to the integration of newcomers in rural communities? What are the main factors for development of social engagement in rural areas?* My research questions follow two preconceptions. First, I assume that emerging relations between newcomers and former village residents can be developed and fostered by social engagement, because of its potential for social capital production. Therefore, in villages with higher levels of social engagement I expect fewer problems with the integration of newcomers and lower levels of community alienation. Second, Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) assume that the most important factors for civic engagement are: access to resources (time, money, and skills), motivation, and networks of recruitment. In their work, they have primarily focused on the political dimension of civic engagement, and I want to explore if such factors are relevant also to the social dimension of engagement, and if there are any other important factors for the development of social engagement in the villages under study. I conducted two case studies in northern

Czech Republic and have presented my findings in this paper. The case studies were completed in two villages, which, despite the fact that they are neighbouring, evince different levels of social engagement. My main argument is that social engagement can contribute to the integration of newcomers into a rural community and thereby accelerate the production of bridging social capital and thus increase cohesion within the community. However, communities that are too successful in attracting and integrating urban newcomers can lose their rural character and become rural communities.

Social and Civic Engagement

Social engagement is very closely related to *civic engagement*, but views on the relationship between these two concepts vary. Because the concept of social engagement used in this article is based on one of the three subcomponents of civic engagement, I will briefly describe their relation. Civic engagement was popularised by Robert Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000), but his work has been criticised for the ambivalence of this term as used in his publications (Berger 2009; Ekman and Amnå 2012), for a misleading interpretation of the role of civil society (Harriss 2001), and even for confusing civic engagement with the term *social capital* (Shortall 2008). According to this critique, there are many authors proposing their own definitions and concepts of civic engagement, but these often seem to be constructed to fit the concept into their studies.

In order to overcome this situation, many researchers seek to devise a definition of civic engagement containing clear distinctions between its subcomponents. Some authors consider social engagement as part of civic engagement, so in their work civic engagement is a more general concept (e.g., Zukin et al. 2006; Berger 2009; Dacombre 2009; Berger 2011). Meanwhile, other authors use civic engagement in the exact opposite sense, that is, as a subcomponent of social engagement (e.g., Lindström, Hanson and Östergren 2001; Morrow-Howell and Gehlert 2012). In addition, Ekman and Amnå (2012) assume that what Berger considers as social engagement is a latent form of political participation. Also, Verba et al.'s (1995) work on civic engagement has focused primarily on its political dimension, and in their explanatory model of political activity they identify why some people are active and participate while others do not. In their model, they suggest three main factors for predicting participatory behaviour: access to resources (namely time, money, and skills), motivation to take part, and networks of recruitment through which citizens are mobilised. The importance of civic engagement is growing in modern societies, where the role of traditional institutions is diminished in fostering and creating social bonds, because of its effects on the maintenance and cultivation of social cohesion in society (Immerfall, Priller and Delhey 2010).

Defining Social Engagement

There is a wide range of definitions of social engagement. The only overall consensus between scholars is that this term is used with regard to participation in social groups (Lindström, Hanson and Östergren 2001; Zukin et al. 2006; Berger 2009; Guillen, Coromina and Salis 2011; Thomas 2011; Morrow-Howell and Gehlert 2012; Barrett and Brunton-Smith

2014; Barrett and Zani 2015). Zukin et al. (2006) understand social engagement as “organized voluntary activity focused on problem solving and helping others” (Zukin et al. 2006:7), while Barrett and Zani focus more on communities and describe civic participation as “activity which is focused on helping others within a community, working on behalf of a community, solving a community problem or participating in the life of a community more generally” (2015:5).

In this article, I use Berger’s (2009) definition of social engagement, which divides civic engagement into three segments: political, social, and moral. In his view, social engagement is understood as a part of civic engagement, which is not related to political activities. More concretely, it is “activity and attention relating to social groups, dynamics and norms” (Berger 2011:5), and “it encompasses all manner of associational involvements” (Berger 2009: 342). Social engagement may be also combined with political engagement and can serve as a resource that fosters or facilitates political type of engagement (Berger 2009). In addition to Berger’s definition, I include in my research only activities outside individuals’ families and circles of close friends (according to the claim about civic engagement from Adler and Goggin 2005).

When repeated, social engagement may produce what Putnam calls social capital, meaning relationships of trust and reciprocity among people¹ (Berger 2009), and social capital is “simultaneously used and built, and the interactions in which this occurs are the only possible occasions when the use and building can occur, as social capital cannot just spring from thin air, as many broader social analyses might imply” (Falk and Kilpatrick 2000:101). Social capital is important not only for communities but also for society as a whole, because it contributes to social cohesion (Stachová, Sýkora and Matoušek 2011).

Third Places

Overall, most of the above-quoted authors focus on socially determined aspects of social engagement (Lindström, Hanson and Östergren 2001; Zukin et al. 2006; Berger 2009; Guillen, Coromina and Salis 2011; Thomas 2011; Morrow-Howell and Gehlert 2012; Barrett and Zani 2015). However, in this paper I want to show that there are also other important preconditions for social engagement: specifically, the existence of places where people can meet spontaneously on a regular basis. Oldenburg (2011) calls these *third places*, the places beyond home and work (which in Oldenburg’s book are considered “first” and “second” places) where people relax in good company. Oldenburg considers them vital for the construction of the infrastructures of human relationships and fostering of civic life. Such places include pubs, cafés, community centres, beauty parlours, etc. Oldenburg describes third places as places

¹ Social capital can be divided into two different parts – bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam 2000). Bonding social capital stems from interactions with people similar to oneself, while bridging social capital arises from interactions with types of people corresponding to the broad sampling of the whole population, and is believed to boost tolerance and acceptance of dissimilarity (Hooghe and Stolle 2003).

that exist on neutral ground and serve to level their guests to a condition of social equality. Within these places, conversation is the primary activity and the major vehicle for the display and appreciation of human personality and individuality. Third places are taken for granted and most have a low profile. Since the formal institutions of society make stronger claims on the individual, third places are normally open in the off hours, as well as at other times. The character of a third place is determined most of all by its regular clientele and is marked by a playful mood, which contrasts with people's more serious involvement in other spheres. Though a radically different kind of setting from home, the third place is remarkably similar to a good home in the psychological comfort and support that it extends. (Oldenburg 1999: 42)

There is a noticeable difference between third places in rural and urban areas. Research on patrons of third places in rural and urban areas has shown “that patrons of the urban coffee shop were more likely to visit the third place for practical reasons such as getting coffee and doing work, while rural customers were more likely to visit shops for social interaction or moral support” (Saey and Foss 2015: 171). Such findings underline the importance of third places for social life in rural communities. Third places in rural areas can play an important role especially for older inhabitants – small communities are dramatically underserved especially for older adults and others in need of additional social support, and third places provide informal networks of support (Mair 2009).

Rurbanisation

Rurbanisation is the phenomenon by which the way of life of the rural population increasingly resembles that in cities (Halás et al. n.d.). Mahajan describes it as “a process of altering rural forms with pre-selected urban patterns and lifestyles, which creates new genetically altered rurban forms” (Mahajan 2010, cited in Paveliuc-Olariu 2010: 41).

Czech researchers have contradictory opinions on the impacts of rurbanisation – some consider it a threat to rural development, others as an opportunity. Lošťák and Hudečková describe rurbanisation as a contemporary threat (2003), building upon the concept's definition as used by European Commission, which describes rurbanisation as a potential threat for environmental, social, and cultural heritage in rural areas located not far from big cities, as they are at risk of becoming so-called bedroom communities only and not places where people live and work (Rural Developments 1997). In contrast, Brabec (2014) describes the positive impacts of rurbanisation on rural development, such as its benefits for and development of the local economy and local business potential, which helps to stabilize the region. The divergence of conclusions on rurbanisation impacts stems from different assumptions about the reasons why newcomers move to rural areas. Lošťák and Hudečková assume that rurbanisation is a phenomenon occurring around large cities (2003), which makes it connected to suburbanization (defined as “migration from cities to an adjacent hinterland” [Šimon 2012: 2]). The city's proximity leads to the fact that newcomers use their new rural address only as a dormitory, but they work and live in the city. In contrast, Brabec perceives rurbanisation as a result of contemporary social change, a kind of “return to roots” by people who feel overburdened with today's “big world”. In Brabec's (2014) interpretation, rurbanisation is just one phenomenon in the overall process of fundamental transformation

of today's socio-economic climate. It has a positive impact on rural development and is not located exclusively around big cities, which makes it connected both to suburbanisation and counterurbanisation (defined as "migration from cities to rural areas beyond the commuting hinterland" [Šimon 2012: 2]).

Newcomers in Rural Communities

In areas where there is a growing number of newcomers moving into pre-existing rural communities, scholars commonly observe some sort of conflict. Conflicts between newcomers and long-term residents can have many causes, such as differences in socioeconomic status and dissimilar lifestyles (Fitchen 1991; Salamon and Tornatore 1994; Smith and Krannich 2000; Krannich, Luloff and Field 2011). These conflicts can also stem from the preconceptions newcomers have about rural life: in their new place of residence they seek a pleasant environment, safety, privacy, and – more than likely – quasi-anonymity (Špačková, Ouředníček and Susová 2012). Smith and Krannich (2000) also point out that "newcomers have very different values than longer-term residents regarding environment, growth, and development issues, and that these differences are resulting in widespread social conflict" (p. 396). New social tensions in rural communities generated by the different value systems of newcomers (they often have urban-oriented, liberal environmental values, in opposition to the greater conservatism of long-term residents) are explained by the theoretical reasoning that "newcomers of urban origin bring a particular sociocultural identity to the rural communities to which they migrate; this identity and the associated value orientations differ significantly from those held by longer-term residents" (Smith and Krannich 2000: 398–9).

Newcomers of urban origin, seeking a higher quality of life, are especially attracted to places of high amenity value related to scenic and outdoor recreation (Smith and Krannich 2000). Such in-migrants later on have different opinions about the development of rural areas because they seek to preserve what attracted them in the first place. For the integration of newcomers into existing communities, it is important that their emerging relations with long-term residents are functional in day-to-day life, with emphasis on the social rather than economic dimension (Špačková, Ouředníček and Susová 2012).

In the Czech context such in-migrants can be classified into five categories of people:

1. Third age migrants – older residents who have already retired or will soon retire, for whom moving to the village is a way to fulfil the dream of a quiet old age in an idyllic rural environment;
2. Empty nesters – with the departure of children from the family home, these people decide to live in a pleasant rural environment, where they may spend the second half of their lives and develop their interests and abilities;
3. Nature-lovers and ecologists – the reason for the relocation from the city to the countryside is their desire to be closer to nature: they prefer a frugal lifestyle, seek to make a livelihood based on local resources and food, and try to live in compliance with traditional rural customs and values;

4. Young counterurbanites – those who move to the countryside because of their children, who they want to be able to spend their childhood in a healthier, safer, and more natural environment, commuting to cities only irregularly or rarely;
5. Involuntary villagers – village life is for them a cheaper alternative to life in the city where real estate is too expensive (Šimon 2011).

Methods

The research was carried out in two villages in Ústecký kraj, Czech Republic, with the main goal of exploring the role of social engagement in relationship building between newcomers and long-term residents within rural communities. The study is based mainly on a qualitative research approach while adopting the research design of two case studies (extremely different cases were selected) with elements of comparison.

As stated earlier, by social engagement I mean, according to Ben Berger, “activity and attention relating to social groups, dynamics and norms” (Berger 2011: 5), which are not primarily focused on politics (although social engagement can be combined with political engagement). With respect to this definition I have observed social engagement as including the following activities: organization and participation in social, cultural, and sporting events, membership in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and informal associations at third places and with people outside one’s own family and circle of close friends.

The methods of data collection were semi-structured interviews, document analysis, non-participant observation, and analysis of statistical data on the local population. I contacted 22 socially engaged citizens and from them interviewed 12 local informants – six from each village (for more detailed information on the interviewed respondents, see Table 1). The first selection of three informants was based on information about members of local NGOs available on the Internet, or in other documents (such as statuses, records from meetings); the second selection of two informants was based on information about the organizers of local events available on the Internet and municipal notice-boards; the rest of the informants were selected based on information from the other informants. All the local informants were to some extent socially engaged in their villages, namely as members of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or organisers of social, cultural, or sporting events. Some informants were interviewed repeatedly. There was a balanced distribution of long-term residents and newcomers² in each group of informants. All interviews were conducted in the spring of 2014, and the research as a whole was undertaken in 2013 and 2014.

Non-participant observation was conducted in the spring months of 2014. The main goal of this observation was to evaluate the presence of third places. Such places had to fulfil four criteria: openness for all social groups, based on neutral territory, with conversation as a major activity, and they had to be situated geographically in the observed municipalities.

² By *newcomers*, I mean inhabitants who moved to the observed communities after 1989. This definition arises from prevailing specifications of newcomers provided by interviewed long-term residents.

Table 1: Interviewed respondents

Village	Newcomer/ Long-term resident	Age	Education	Purpose of moving into the village
Bynovec	Newcomer	30–40	Tertiary	Young and responsible
Bynovec	Newcomer	40–50	Tertiary	Involuntary villager
Bynovec	Newcomer	50–60	Upper-secondary	Involuntary villager
Bynovec	Long-term	20–30	Upper-secondary	–
Bynovec	Long-term	60+	Upper-secondary	–
Bynovec	Long-term	50–60	Vocational	–
Růžová	Newcomer	30–40	Upper- secondary	Nature-lover and ecologist
Růžová	Newcomer	50–60	Tertiary	Young and responsible
Růžová	Newcomer	60+	Tertiary	Third age migrant
Růžová	Long-term	50–60	Upper- secondary	–
Růžová	Long-term	40–50	Upper- secondary	–
Růžová	Long-term	40–50	Upper-secondary	–

Document analysis was undertaken in order to find information about the members of local NGOs; regular and irregular social, cultural, and sporting events; overall information on the municipalities and NGOs; the location of third places; and the main problems in both villages. The types of analysed documents included: records from municipal council meetings, documents from municipal notice-boards, statutes of local NGOs, records from NGO meetings, municipal webpages, village profiles on Facebook, municipal newsletters, and articles in regional and local newspapers.

Data analysis started with the literal transcription of each interview. Then, the transcriptions and the information from document analysis went through a process of open coding, in which I looked for relevant concepts and categories. The data were then analysed and interpreted with a focus on looking for relationships with the theoretical background of the study. Comparing levels of social engagement in both villages was based on the number of local NGOs and the number of social, cultural, and sporting events that take place on a weekly and annual basis.

Study Sites

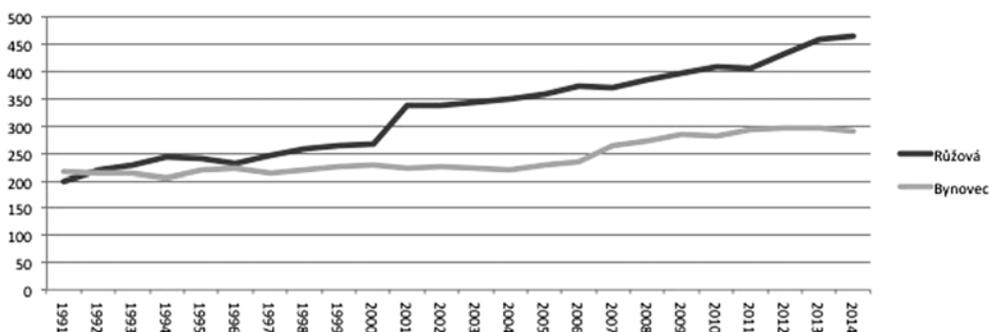
Both villages are located in the area of the former *Sudetenland*, where social relations have developed against the backdrop of a history of massive migratory flows starting with the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia, followed by resettlement under the Communist regime, and rapid development in the transitional period after 1989 (Matějka 2008). After 1989, major societal and economic changes occurred, most of them having a big impact on rural areas.³ Market deregulation significantly changed the proprietary relations in

³ By *rural area* I mean municipalities that have less than 2,000 inhabitants. This definition of rural area comes from a demographic approach and is broadly used in the Czech context (Librová 1997; Vošta 2010). Rural areas comprise 73 % of the total area of the Czech Republic, within which live 26,9 % of the population (Čmejrek 2013).

many Czech villages. A new privatisation program was conducted, characterised by the restitution of houses, other buildings, and real estate confiscated by the communists to their former owners (True 2003).

The communities observed in the case studies are represented by two small villages⁴ in the northern part of the Czech Republic. The villages lie not far from each other, had similar numbers of inhabitants after the end of the Communist regime (around 200 each), and have both experienced an increase in the number of newcomers in recent years, mainly from urban areas (see Chart 1). Both villages are situated in an area with high recreational potential, in the region of the Bohemian Switzerland National Park.

Chart 1: Population between 1991 and 2014 in Bynovec and Růžová



Source: Czech Statistical Office 2014

Both municipalities are represented by female mayors, which corresponds with the finding that smaller municipalities in the Czech Republic are more often led by women than bigger ones (Ryšavý 2016a). There are two main types of mayors in Czech Republic – those with full-time paid functions, and those with part-time functions alongside other employment. The professionalization of local politicians is highly influenced by the number of inhabitants in a municipality – the position of mayor involves paid full-time work in less than one third of municipalities with 200–399 inhabitants (Bernard et al. 2011). In municipalities with part-time mayors, municipal management is based on more or less voluntary, unprofessional service and in villages there is virtually no apparatus for strategic development (Bernard 2012). Small Czech villages frequently have only one administrative employee, who is responsible mainly for accounting. The mayor is often responsible for the fulfilment of the local administration’s goals, and is among other things liable for the cohesion of the whole village (Bernard 2012). In small municipalities in the Czech Republic, the mayor is responsible for:

- development and maintaining of cohesion (inside the local administration as a whole and throughout the village)
- determination of the main developmental priorities and political programme

⁴ By *small village*, in the Czech context I mean a village with less than 500 inhabitants.

- representation of the municipality in the outside world (with other actors from the public administration, businesses, and the civic sector)
- securing fulfilment of necessary tasks (such as implementation of approved decisions, supervision of municipal employees, and management of administrative agenda connected with the functioning of the municipality) (Bernard 2012: 25).

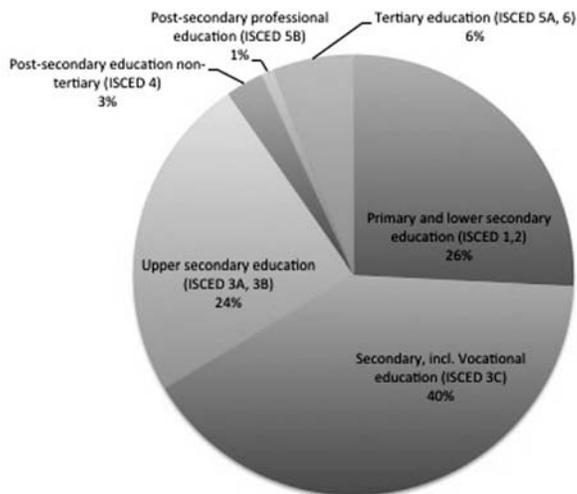
Findings

Bynovec

Bynovec is a small village situated 8 kilometres from a regional centre, the city of Děčín, which has nearly 50,000 inhabitants. It is located in the Protected Landscape Area Labské pískovce. Between 1991 and 2014, the number of inhabitants increased from 216 to 290, a total increase of 74 inhabitants (see Chart 1).

According to the 2011 Population and Housing Census, carried out by the Czech Statistical Office (Český statistický úřad 2016), the educational level of Bynovec's inhabitants (see Chart 2) is lower (for higher levels of education) than the national average. In Bynovec, 4.5 % of inhabitants have a tertiary education, whereas the national average is 10.7 %, and 18.1 % of its population has attained an upper secondary education, whereas the national average is 23.2 %.

Chart 2: Education in Bynovec in 2011



Source: Czech Statistical Office 2016

According to the 2011 census, 37.6 % of inhabitants are employed (compared to the 43.9 % national average), 7.7 % unemployed (4.8 % national average); 47.7 % are not economically active (45.8 % national average), and the rest are not identified.

The level of social engagement here is significantly lower than in the other village under study. Also, there are fewer third places, especially indoor places with higher capacity (which are essential for organising events year round) (see Table 2). Third places in this research were observed in 2014, and include:

- Outdoors: football field, playground, foot tennis court
- Indoor capacity up to 10 persons: the local library
- Indoor capacity for more than 10 persons: the local pub

In 2014 two social, cultural, or sporting events took place with annual periodicity (namely, Children’s Day and the “witches burning”). There are three non-governmental organizations based in Bynovec: the Volunteer Fire Department of Bynovec, Football Club Bynovec, and the Sport Flying Club Bynovec.

Table 2: Activities of social engagement and third places in Bynovec

Bynovec	
Number of NGOs	3
<i>Third places</i>	
Outdoor	3
Indoor capacity up to 10	1
Indoor capacity more than 10	1
<i>Social, cultural or sporting events</i>	
With weekly periodicity	0
With annual periodicity	2

In Bynovec I observed animosities between “long-term residents” and “newcomers”. Long-term residents describe a very unpleasant social atmosphere; the two groups of residents do not trust each other and the bridging social capital of the local community seems to be at a low level. The division between long-term residents and newcomers came up as the main social cleavage in the community. Such cleavage is often identified in rural suburban areas (Čmejrek et al. 2009). Two of the three interviewed newcomers expressed their wish to move to another village because of the bad social relations in Bynovec, but on the other hand, this could be explained by their position as “unvoluntary villagers”, who moved in mainly for financial reasons – only in a rural area was the price of real estate property affordable for them. The long-term residents pointed out that the increase in the number of new inhabitants is the main cause of the disharmony in the community. According to the long-term residents, the newcomers do not want to engage with long-term residents, and they even think that newcomers look down on them with contempt: “Sometimes I have the feeling that they [newcomers] are the entrepreneurs and they despise the long-term residents. As if they were inferior. Because of this, the long-term residents do not respect them and the relations between [both groups of] neighbours are strained” (Respondent 5). One factor influencing the feeling of inferiority of long-term residents could be the low number of third places, which have the potential to level their guests to socially equal conditions

(Oldenburg 1999) and thus facilitate the emergence of new relations between newcomers and long-term residents.

There are also remarkable differences between the lifestyles and values of both groups, as two long-term residents said: “They [newcomers] do not fit in here ... they just moved in here from the city ... they just don’t know the village problems . . . Well, they have weird ideas. I guess we have a different mentality” (Respondent 2); “They [newcomers] just come here and they are bothered by normal village life. They would like to establish different habits here” (Respondent 11). Long-term residents want to keep their lifestyle, so they strongly oppose newcomers and exclude them from their community. In addition, the newcomers consider the village social life vulgar and primitive: “They do play football here. I was there once, but it was pretty vulgar. And the old settlers would usually go to the pub, and it is also primitive [their behaviour] in the pub” (Respondent 1). Long-term residents are more influenced by the common norms of living – they greet each other, they are not bothered by side effects associated with small farming activities (like a bad smell or noise in the neighbourhood), and they are more likely to get involved in common work for the community. In contrast, the new residents of Bynovec tend to live their lives the way they used to in the cities. They appreciate a higher level of privacy, they don’t have an interest in meeting long-term residents, and according to the records from municipal council meetings there is a remarkable number of conflicts between both groups of residents, especially in places where there are neighbouring residents from both groups.

The newcomers often make demands on the municipal council for changes in the village such as regulation of small farming activities, building new infrastructure, or lowering the speed limit in the village, but the members of the council (who are long-term residents and have a majority on the council) mostly reject their suggestions. As one member of council puts it in interview, this is because they feel the need to protect their way of life. In interviews, long-term residents sneer about the demands of newcomers: “He would just like to have the road painted pink, and paint on it doggies and pussies”, Respondent 5 said, talking about the demand of a newcomer to lower the speed limit in the village centre. Because the newcomers do not hold a majority on the council, they cannot push through the reforms they wish for.

After the end of the Communist regime, the social atmosphere in the village was, according to the statements of long-term residents, much better and there were more social events, but nowadays there has been a noticeable decline in the number of events: “After 1989 there was a sort of euphoria here – people united together, stuck together, discussed together. Nowadays, it is in decline again” (Respondent 5). If there are events, people do not participate, because long-term residents don’t want to meet newcomers and vice versa: “They don’t want to participate, neither long-term residents nor newcomers. Because they don’t want to meet each other” (Respondent 11). Recently, there have been only two social events in the village every year. One of them is an event for kids, but not even this event, which is so important in the eyes of long-term residents, can bring the community together: “They [newcomers] do not even attend the events for kids, which are really popular here. They do not participate. Not even if they become some sort of gift” (Respondent 5).

However, the situation in the village is not such that citizens do not get together at all. Most social events are organised privately, and only long-term residents meet each other there. This group of residents is connected by family ties; as one long-term resident said with some exaggeration, three-fourths of the residents in the village are her kin (Respondent 5). Long-term residents are also more satisfied with social life in Bynovec, but they do emphasise that this social life is experienced only by long-term residents. One resident calls it the “village guild”, which he specifies as a group of long-term residents who stick together and mutually support each other (Respondent 3). In this case, private associations reinforce the bonding social capital for groups of long-term residents and make it even harder for newcomers to get involved in the local community.

Interviewees identified three main reasons why the residents are not more socially engaged. The first is the lack of presence of capable leaders. A newcomer talking about the chances of encouraging residents to participate in social engagement activities said, “I think that much will depend on the charisma of a person, who will be capable to convince other people. To push them somehow” (Respondent 1). In many small villages the role of leader is played by the mayor (Bernard 2011). In Bynovec, the mayor has only a part-time position, so his or her possibilities are limited in comparison with full-time mayors. The second reason mentioned by inhabitants of Bynovec is the lack of places for realisation of events and community interaction, especially indoor spaces. The third significant reason is the presence of mistrust and mutual prejudices between both groups of citizens.

Růžová

Růžová is a village located 12 kilometres from the regional centre. Part of its territory is situated in National Park České Švýcarsko. The rest of its territory, outside the national park, lies in the Protected Landscape Area Labské pískovce. In the village, the level of social engagement has shown to be higher compared to Bynovec (see Table 2). Between 1991 and 2014, the number of inhabitants increased from 199 to 465, a total increase of 266 inhabitants (see Chart 1).

According to the data on the educational level of inhabitants in Růžová, carried out as part of the 2011 Population and Housing Census (Český statistický úřad 2016), the overall situation with regard to higher levels of education is better in Růžová than in Bynovec (see Chart 3). In Růžová, 6.8 % of inhabitants have a tertiary education (compared to Bynovec at 4.5 %, and the national average of 10.7 %), and 26.8 % have an upper secondary education (Bynovec 18.1 %; national average 23.2 %).

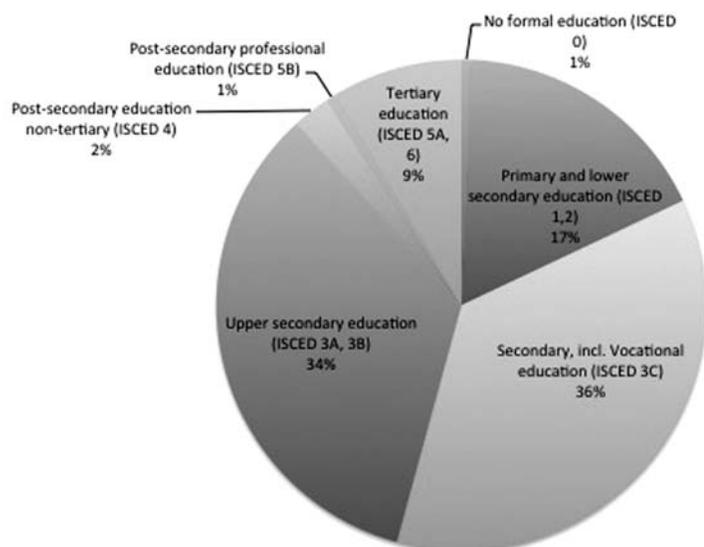
According to the 2011 census, 43.0 % of inhabitants in this village are employed (compared to a national average of 43.9 %), 6% are unemployed (4.8 % national average), 43.5 % are not economically active (45.8 % national average), and the rest were not identified.

Third places in this municipality were observed in 2014, and include:

- Outdoors: playground, tennis and volleyball court, football field
- Indoor capacity up to 10 persons: the local library,
- Indoor capacity for more than 10 persons: the municipal hall, church, restaurant with bowling, pub, and another restaurant

In 2014 nine social, cultural, or sporting events with a weekly periodicity took place (hip hop for kids, yoga, “handmade” workshop, Zumba exercise, meetings of the local choir, country dance training for kids, football training, foot tennis training, church services – in the 2011 census, 26 inhabitants identified with the Roman Catholic religion), and there were 19 other events taking place on an annual basis (Celtic telegraph, “witches burning”, Children’s Day, carnival procession, football cup, Carnival, senior party, New Year’s climb on a nearby hill, Christmas concert in church, hunter’s party, welcoming of newborns, St. Patrick’s party, country dance show, sport competition of local teen-agers, summer concerts, a rock music festival, majorette show, St. Peter’s celebration, and night of open churches).

Chart 3: Education in Růžová in 2011



Source: Czech Statistical Office 2016

There are eight non-governmental organizations based in Růžová. Two are oriented towards sports – Sport Club Růžová and the equestrian club. The NGO “Růženky” brings together local women with the goal of developing the village, which is mainly fulfilled by gardening on municipal properties, organisation of events, and the weekly organization of “handmade” workshops during the winter season. The fourth NGO runs a local “Indian village”, where guided tours, school programmes, and an Indian show take place. The fifth NGO is the Catholic parish in Růžová, which takes care of the church and carries out Catholic church services. The next three NGOs have specific targets – the rescue and preservation of the local historic site called Dolský mlýn, management of the hunting district in Růžová, and dealing with ecological and geological inquiries (this is the only NGO not engaged in local events at any level).

Table 3: Activities of social engagement and third places in Růžová

Růžová	
Number of NGOs	8
<i>Third places</i>	
Outdoor	3
Indoor capacity up to 10	1
Indoor capacity more than 10	5
<i>Social, cultural or sporting events</i>	
With weekly periodicity	9
With annual periodicity	19

In Růžová citizens are more socially active, while an important role in the organizing of activities is played by a local leader – the mayor: “Well, if it weren’t for the leaders, nothing would ever happen. Without a leader, nobody does anything. And that is why the mayor here is so good” (Respondent 6). The mayor comes up with ideas for new social activities in the village and is capable of motivating locals to get involved in those activities. The post of mayor in Růžová is considered a professional office, which means he or she is fully paid for municipal work. This significantly increases his or her capacity to engage in local matters, including the organisation of social events. Here my finding corresponds with Bernard’s finding, that the “mayor of small village represents specific local leader, who may become the creator of the municipal developmental strategy and activate outer and inner potentials, which allow him to fulfil such strategy” (Bernard 2012: 3).

Another important role in social events is played by the local women’s club, and the main motive for its establishment was “to help the village with organization of all those events” (Respondent 12). This women’s organisation is currently the biggest and most active organisation within the municipality, but six other local NGOs (out of a total of eight) annually participate in the organisation of the main social event – the Carnival procession.

All year round there are many events going on in the village, at which newcomers have the opportunity to make contact with long-term residents and vice versa. The production of bridging social capital occurs at the events. Inhabitants describe these events as an arena in which they can solve problems with their neighbours without any need for escalation,

because if residents meet each other [newcomers and long-term residents at the social events] they tackle every problem – for example, if two neighbours don’t talk to each other, this is the way how it’s usually corrected. Or a third person gets involved and explains to them that there is no need for being in conflict. It is necessary for people to meet, that goes without saying. And there [during events] they do meet. I think it is really good, this grouping. (Respondent 10)

As Stachová, Sýkora and Matoušek (2011) point out, reinforcement of social capital reduces social tensions and helps to prevent social conflicts. Also, the higher level of bridging social capital enables the creation of new social relationships with newcomers.

Both groups of residents describe a very pleasant social climate in Růžová, good relations in their neighbourhood, and the absence of fundamental controversies. Each year residents take

part in common work for the community, such as the village clean-up: “we meet in our volunteer work to clean up the village, and a lot of people come to help. We also request citizens to clean their property and the piece of municipal property in front of their house, and it is visible that it works” (Respondent 10). During the process of registering for permanent residence in the village, newcomers must visit the municipal office, where they are welcomed and informed by the mayor about the basic rules of living in Růžová. The mayor also attempts to encourage new citizens to participate in activities of social engagement right from the beginning of their residency by notifying them of upcoming events and offering them the chance to help in the organisation of such events. Recently, new residents have not been engaged in the organisation of events as they were in the past because they expect the municipality and women’s club to take care of it: “They want entertainment, but they would like everything to be prepared for them as a turnkey project. They will not engage, they just want to come and have fun” (Respondent 10). This is in contrast with past experiences, when the residents took care of organising all events.

The only problem mentioned by all interviewed long-term residents is the modification of the village character into a rural area:

What certainly disappeared from our municipality is the spirit of village. It started with all this construction [of houses]. And what I always claimed, earlier when someone moved in here, the village always manipulated him into desired behaviour. Now it is exactly the other way around. Because many new people moved here, the village regrettably lost its character. Unfortunately, the people from the city totally crushed us [long-term residents]. (Respondent 7)

Long-term residents accept this major change in the character of the local community, and do not undertake any activities to turn this tendency around. However, they do sentimentally talk about the “spirit of village” that seems to have been lost because of the dominance of new residents and their habits and values in the contemporary community.

The presence of places for spontaneous meeting of people, called “third places” by Oldenburg (2001), has been shown to be very important for the development of social engagement. In such places, people present their ideas for new activities of social engagement to others, gathering support, and some places are even essential as the places where the activities are realized. Also, third places provide for newcomers the opportunity to develop relations with long-term residents.

Conclusions

Social engagement plays an important role in the integration of newcomers in rural communities. Semi-structured interviews, document analysis and non-participant observation revealed that public activities of social engagement – such as participation in local NGOs and social, cultural, and sporting events – offer newcomers possibilities to get involved in rural community life and increase the level of bridging social capital within the community. Such activities also open spaces for relations-building and an arena for conflict resolution. For newcomers, social engagement activities function as a “gateway” into existing rural communities.

The research confirms the importance of three factors for the development of engagement: access to resources, motivation, and networks of recruitment, as presented by Verba et al. (1995). However, I propose that two more factors are equally important in the case of social engagement: the presence of capable leaders and the existence of third places, where people can spontaneously meet on a daily basis. Factors mentioned by Verba et al. (1995) for the development of political participation play a central role, but without leaders the spark to strike the flame of social engagement is absent. In the village with a higher level of social engagement, the mayor leads many social activities, which is in accordance with Berger's proposition that political engagement may be combined with social engagement. Especially in small villages, both types of engagement overlap. This can be explained by Bernard's reasoning that the mayors of small municipalities are, among other things, responsible for the cohesion of the village as a whole. My findings also confirm Oldenburg's (1999) assumption about the relevance of third places for the building of human relationships and fostering of civic life. I have demonstrated their importance in the setting and organisation of activities of social engagement and in the sustaining and advancement of day-to-day relations.

The findings of this paper underline the importance of social engagement in preventing fragmentation within rural communities and the integration of newcomers into existing communities. However, the successful integration of newcomers can be a major factor accelerating the process of rurbanisation of villages. If the inflow of newcomers is too high and occurs too quickly, communities can lose their rural character and begin to resemble an urban area. In Růžová, I observed the integration, and in Bynovec, exclusion, of newcomers from existing communities. Bynovec's exclusion of newcomers made the community of long-term residents capable of maintaining their rural lifestyle. Růžová's integration of newcomers accelerated the vanishing of its rural character. This finding should be directly linked to the discussion of the impacts of rurbanisation as presented in the articles by Lošťák and Hudečková (2003) and Brabec (2014), and it emphasises the importance of our point of view in the evaluation of such impacts. Which is more important for contemporary villages: increasing the number of inhabitants, improving the availability of services, and making possible a comfortable lifestyle? Or is our goal to maintain the character of rural societies, their lifestyle, culture, and traditions?

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