



## WELCOMING SPACES

**WP3 – Policies & Governance**  
Notes on a multi-actors encounter  
By José Ricardo Martins

### **Welcoming Spaces Roundtable in Saalfeld /Saale (Free State of Thuringia, Germany)**

**Agency, Entrepreneurship and Employment:  
Learning from each other about and from migrants**  
(22 September 2022)



Photo: Keina Espiñeira



## 1. Background of Roundtable

Welcoming initiatives can contribute to the further development of shrinking areas while also offering space for the successful social-economic inclusion of non-EU migrants in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (*'leaving no one behind'*). Often welcoming initiatives are run by cooperating actors from different societal fields, and their actions and impact depend on the local contexts. However, a turning point is necessary: migrants must have a key place in the knowledge production about migrants.



View of the participants at the opening of the event.  
Photo: Keina Espiñeira

### Aims of the roundtable:

The event aimed at bringing together politicians, city councilors, public administrators responsible for migration inclusion, social policy workers, and development planners at the local, district, and state levels, as well as migrants, international researchers, and practitioners from social organizations to share experiences, ideas and receive new insights related to the sustainable (long-term) inclusion of migrants and the development of their territories. The underlying question was: *What entails sustainable migrant inclusion?*



Prof. Dr Sabine Meier, moderator of the event. Photo: Keina Espiñeira

### Objectives set for the roundtable:

1. Promote continuous network development with the encouragement of discussions and cooperation among actors from different political levels and various interest groups.
2. Share local, state, national and international experiences on inspiring projects that offer solutions to the successful inclusion of migrants, especially related to employability and entrepreneurship.
3. Share the challenges faced in implementing migrant inclusion policies, especially the ones that are intended to foster employment and entrepreneurship among migrants.
4. Raise awareness of the diversity of the migrant population and their potential for further development of shrinking regions.
5. Exert political influence to place the topic of participation of migrants and their agency on the political agenda at all levels, promote awareness of the current populism and discuss instruments to overcome xenophobia.

Despite a lot of creative energy and good examples of a welcoming culture, the welcome initiatives are experiencing growing challenges, but there are also encouraging practical experiences.

That is why we brought together actors of the welcoming initiatives in Thuringia and Rhineland-Palatinate, besides sharing international experiences from Italy, Netherlands, Poland and Spain. The roundtable was organized in the framework of the international comparative and EU-funded research project 'Welcoming Spaces in Europe' ([www.welcomingspaces.eu](http://www.welcomingspaces.eu)).

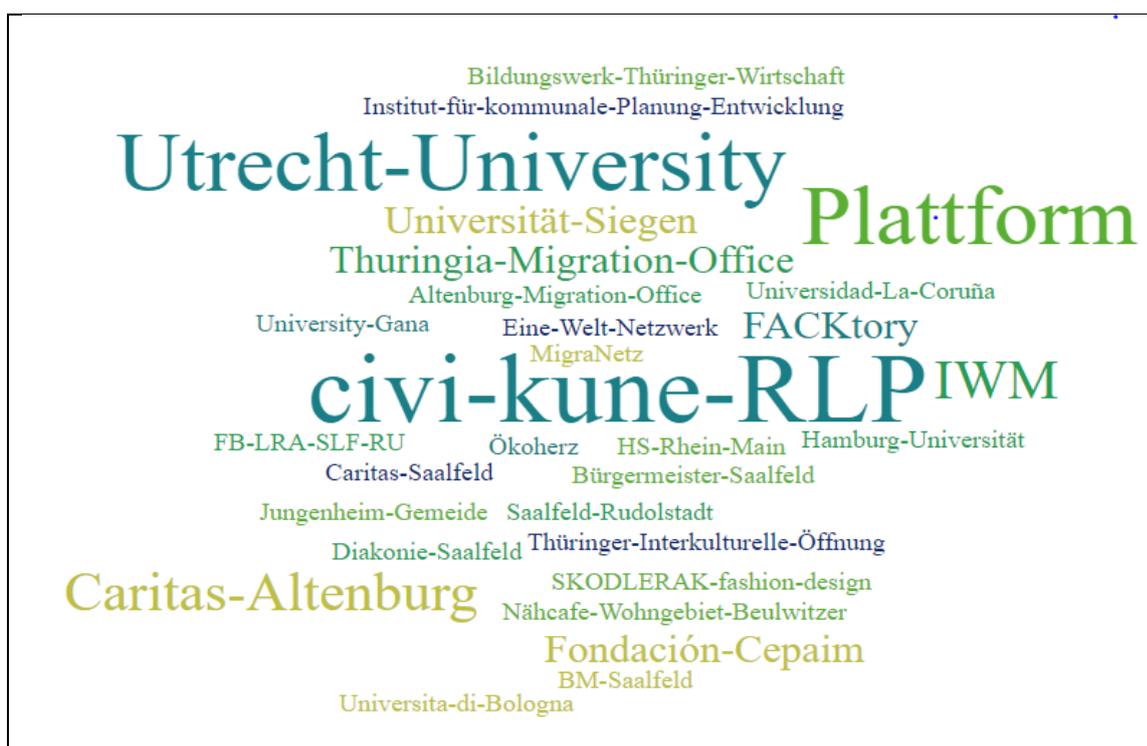
With a premise in mind - **“learning from each other about and from migrants”** - we got together on 22 September 2022 in the town of Saalfeld, State of Thuringia (Germany) to discuss agency, entrepreneurship and employment of migrants in the process of their sustainable inclusion.



#### Whom did we reach?

- **160 people attended**
- **35 different organisations present**
- ✓ Actors from welcome initiatives in Thuringia and Rhineland-Palatinate
- ✓ The inhabitants and migrants of the addressed districts in Thuringia and Rhineland-Palatinate
- ✓ Migrant organisations
- ✓ Actors of the municipal administration, welfare state organisations and other social institutions and associations that are committed to the inclusion of migrants
- ✓ Thuringia State Commissioner for Integration, Migration and Refugees
- ✓ Local and district integration managers
- ✓ Local and district politicians and policymakers
- ✓ Academics and researchers

The following **word cloud** shows the organisations and their representativity in our event:



## 2. Initial greetings

Prof. Dr Sabine Meier, the moderator of the roundtable, welcomed all the participants on behalf of the Welcoming Spaces project.

The mayor of Saalfeld, Dr Steffen Kania (right photo), greeted the local, national, and international participants and explained how Saalfeld is making efforts to welcome and integrate migrants, emphasizing endeavors to receive the Ukrainian refugees.



Photo: Keina Espiñeira



Photos: Keina Espiñeira

Prof. Dr Johannes Schädler (far left photo) represented the University of Siegen (Germany), which was one of the promoters of the event.

*“The University of Siegen aims to contribute to the Welcoming Spaces project.”*

Mrs Juliane Döschner (left), representing the co-organizer of the event, Plattform e.V., gave a warm welcome to the guests and speakers.

## 3. Migrants’ agency at the front scene

Political actors and policymakers, social agents, migrants and academics were presented with successful cases and confronted with challenges of continuing efforts for effective social inclusion of migrants, enabling them to be agents of their successful emplacement and participants in the local revitalization.



Syuzanna Fiberg of the **Praxisprojekt IWM** showed through a performance that sustainable cooperation between migrants, local residents and other actors is possible through cultural representations. This was a started point for further inspiring experiences.

Okka Senst of **Civi Kune RLP** (a project maintained by the Council of Refugees of the state of Rhineland-Palatinate) brought the experience of places of welcome: Encounter cafés (*Begegnungscafés*) and initiatives of solidarity-based for refugees' work in the rural regions of the state of Rhineland-Palatinate, which includes the provision of accommodation in a decentralised manner. Some challenges the rural areas of the state of Rheinland-Palatinate are facing were pointed out:

- mobility
- housing shortage
- labour market integration (and the shortage of skilled labour)
- lack of stable structures and financing in integration work:
- not all towns have an institutionalized integration concept, a formal structure in the administration or a full-time officer or coordinator for the refugee work.



Okka Senst (Civi Kune RLP). Photo: Keina Espiñeira

***Begegnungscafés***, created and promoted by civi kune RLP, are a form of revitalising the places through encounters that help keep migrants attached to the places where they live and generate economic activity. They aim to compensate for the lack of social activities and interactions in the rural areas of the Rhineland-Palatinate state while promoting economic activity.



Photos: Civi Kune RLP



Valentin Rühlmann and Nazmi Jmo of **FACTory** presented the entrepreneurial efforts of young leaders in Altenburg and the region to keep young people on the territory through social entrepreneurship. The focus of entrepreneurial initiatives supported by FACTory is in the creative, digital economy fields. Creating relations is one of the key values, as it is the best way to integrate different cultures and for keeping young people on the territory.

Valentin Rühlmann (left) and Nazmi Jmo (right).  
Photo: J R Martins



FACTory project counts with 104 young members that plan to create a life in their local communities, among them a few migrants. Besides the support for entrepreneurship, the bond to keep people on the territory, according to Valentin, is the valorizing of culture in its diversity and creating relationships.

Judith Skoderak of Skoderak Fashion and Rafiat Owolarafe of Näh Cafés presented the project **Beuwitz Design**. In this project, migrants can engage in creativity through fashion and design and entrepreneurship. The project takes place in an atelier, as shown by the pictures below.

Judith Skoderak (left) and Rafiat Owolarafe (right).  
Photo: J R Martins





Ateliers of Beuwitz Design project. Photos: Workshop Beulwitz Design

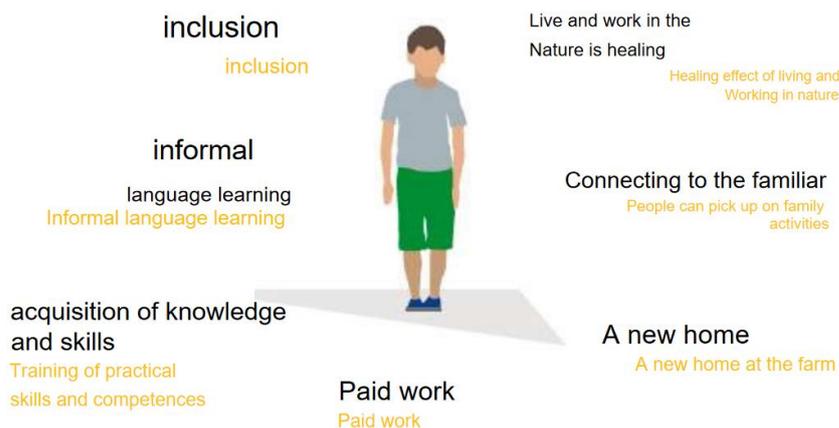
Claudia Schneider of **Ökoherz Thüringen** brought social farming as a means of the inclusion of migrants, a place to learn the informal language, and a place of job creation for migrants, as well as a place for healing traumatized migrants through the connection with animals and farming. Ökoherz also promotes intercultural gardens, which are places where migrants cultivate their known vegetables and learn to cultivate new ones. Claudia has also raised the issue that agriculture has prejudice to exploit farmers, migrants included.



## The diversity and the potential of social farming:

### Social farming with refugees

#### Social Farming - A way to support refugees



Source: Claudia Schneider / Ökoherz Thüringen

Marcel Sachse and Mandy Gora of **THINKA Saalfeld** presented their organization which is focused on counselling for refugees and migrants, including employment counselling, mainly helping migrants going through the bureaucracy. The category of migrants helped, by country of origin, are Syrians, Poles and Ukraine.

## 4. The policy table

Our event was grounded on the premise that sustainable inclusion goes far beyond the first welcoming assistance, and it aimed to discuss the challenges the political actors, policymakers, social welfare agents, and migrants face in rebuilding their lives in a new environment in view of a long-time stay. For this reason, we brought speakers to this table who could contribute and receive insights on how to propose migrants with a fresh start and transform them into actors of full capacity and an integral part of the strategies for demographic and economic revitalization of shrinking areas.

Political actors, policymakers, and social policy implementors discussed the challenges and opportunities of migrants' inclusion and its perspectives from a multi-level perception (state, district and municipal).



(From left) Ms Juliane Corredor Jimenez, M.S., Mr Herbert Petri, Mr Volker Liebelt, Mr Rolf-Henryk Thalmann, Mrs Mirjam Kruppa, Mr. Martin Spitzer. Photo: Keina Espiñeira

**Mrs Mirjam Kruppa** - Thuringia State Commissioner for Integration, Migration and Refugees (Ministry of Justice, Social and Family) – gave us an encompassing appraisal on “Migrants’ integration policies in the state of Thuringia: challenges and outcomes.” Mrs Kruppa emphasized the role of education in the integration and inclusion process to overcome the racist and discrimination problems present in the state of Thuringia. Research showed that 60% of Thuringians agree with migration, but 62% of migrants face integration problems. The proposed solution, according to the Commissioner, is through education, especially from the kindergarten, besides the promotion of encounters to enable migrants and locals can know each other.



Mrs Mirjam Kruppa  
Photo: J R Martins

**Mr Rolf-Henryk Thalmann** - Saalfeld-Rudolstadt District Head of the Department of Youth and Social Affairs – presented the “Measures for the reception of immigrants in Saalfeld.” Mr Thalmann pointed out the increase in the number of migrants living in the district: today they are 4,000 and will be 6,000 in 2023, and the need for a change in integration law and a new legal framework. He also raised the issue that impacts the governance of migration policy implementation: integration managers often leave their positions, as they are not permanent ones, but based on projects.



From left to right: Ms Corredor Jimenez, Mr Petri, Mr Liebelt and Mr Thalmann.

**Mr Volker Liebelt** - Altenburg Caritas' manager – spoke on the “Arrival and moving on of immigrants in Altenburg: Challenges and results.” Mr Liebelt highlighted Caritas' work in supporting migrants in finding different welfare services. Nowadays special emphasis is given to Ukrainian migrants, which have some specific characteristics compared to previous migration waves: they are mostly women and children. His intervention was supported by a Ukrainian counsellor at Caritas, a migrant herself, and by the Altenburg migration district manager, Mr Strahlendorf.

**Mr Herbert Petri** - Mayor of Jugenheim, Rhineland-Palatinate presented “Welcome initiatives in Jugenheim, Rheinhessen: Challenges and results.” As a mayor, Mr Petri acts as an “integration manager” in his 1,692 inhabitant-municipality, from whom 182 are

migrants. He enthusiastically presented three initiatives being run in his community: “Inclusive Community”, “Welcome to the village”, and “Ukraine Help”.

**Mrs Juliane Corredor Jimenez, M.S.** - Sustainability manager of the Saalfeld-Rudolstadt District and Willy Brandt School of Public Policy at the University of Erfurt – spoke about “Economic and development planning in the context of sustainable, inclusive and viable development: What role do migrants play?” Mrs Jimenez highlighted some aspects of the strategy she is drafting for the development of the district with an emphasis on sustainability, including digitalization, climate change and economic transition. This includes a strategy to attract and attach people to the district through employment

## 5. The international table

The international table was a moment where colleagues of the Welcoming Spaces project in Italy, the Netherlands and Spain could share their research and inspiring local initiatives aiming at the well-being and sustainable emplacement of migrants.

**Alberto Alonso Fradejas**, from Utrecht University, presented sophisticated results of 143 initiatives in 49 marginalized regions in the Welcoming Spaces project countries. His research is entitled “Agency and locality in efforts to attract and attach migrant newcomers and longtime residents in marginalized EU areas.” One of the conclusions is that the less densely populated, the more remote, highly ageing population and the more marginalized a region is, the more active the emplacement efforts by migrants it is and the more these efforts are appreciated by the longtime residents.

In her presentation, **Keina Espiñeira**, from the University La Coruña, emphasized innovative models of migration governance and emplacement that she has found in Spanish local shrinking municipalities. Civic



engagements are a good perspective to explore new processes of local governance. This includes initiatives for the recognition of the rights of migrants and refugees, such as political and labour rights (especially for those working in the agriculture sector).

**Alice Lomonaco**, from the University of Bologna, introduced us to the “Welcoming and generative local reception as an agent of territorial development in Italian shrinking areas.” Alice stressed the positive role of social capital in the inclusion of migrants, including social infrastructure, public events, training courses and internships in local businesses. If not taken in functional terms and if considering migrants’ aspirations, migration can



be an important factor in local development, concluded Alice.

**Sara Miellet** presented her study “Welcoming initiatives, regional revitalisation and links to care infrastructures and energy transition: insights from Dutch localities.” Sara found in her research uneven arrival landscapes and also emerging Welcoming initiatives in The Nether-

lands focused on language, intercultural exchange and professional training in view of employment in the care and sustainable energy sectors. Communities help migrants to create their organisations.



**Carmen Ayllon Medrano** and **Irene Almazan**, from Fundación Cepaim in Spain, presented the different areas Cepaim is involved in and the activities carried out by the organization.

The presentation was about “Employment guidance in rural areas” and they emphasised rural development and demographic challenge. Emphasis was given to the *Nuevos Senderos* project which provides, qualifies and proportionates social inclusion for migrants through labour. Special attention is given to rural women through two programmes that aim to improve their employability as an employee or as entrepreneurs.

## 6. Concluding remarks and propositions raised in the Saalfeld Roundtable

The Saalfeld Roundtable brought together migrants, policymakers, practitioners, citizens and academics to learn and inspire each other about the positive welcoming initiatives and the challenges migrants, policymakers and practitioners face. The roundtable tackled migrants’ agency, entrepreneurial capacity, and employment hardships. There was also appreciation of different cases of long-term residents working side-by-side in socio-entrepreneurship activities, as was the case in Altenburg and Saalfeld.

However, a reasonable number of Welcoming Initiatives are problematic in terms of sustainability. Not only the ones run by civil society but also public-led ones. Below, we specify these issues in terms of governance and policy, and we bring in the propositions raised at the event.

### Governance:

- Usually projects are based on a one-year period. So, there is discontinuity, interruption of activities, and insecurity for workers, volunteers and for migrants alike
- There is a turnover of personnel and project leaders, as people seek permanent positions

- New demands from the bottom face difficulties to fit into old policy/governance systems: changes and new laws are demanded
- Lack of stable structures and financing for the integration work: not all towns have an institutionalized migration integration concept, a formal structure in the administration or a full-time officer or coordinator for the refugee work. Many work voluntarily

**Policies:** there are challenges related to

- Mobility in rural areas (lack of public transportation or too expensive for an asylum seeker)
- housing shortage (paradox: shrinking x lack of houses)
- labour market integration faces challenges related to racism, equivalence, or registration of diplomas; proof of work experience; language knowledge.

**Governance and policy recommendations:**

- Project funding should be transferred into regular public funding structures and, therefore, new integration laws are needed to rule the money distribution from the top-down
- There is a need for a participation law to mitigate the top-down ruling
- Crowdfunding is recommended to avoid the bureaucratic distribution of money
- Make jobs more attractive to find personal
- Arrange regular and visible offers for advice (done by local governments and other organisations in place, nearby by the people)
- Multiply the announcements by majors to all inhabitants (“Bürgerbrief”) in ad-hoc situations
- Make more use of technical tools, such as video translations
- Run the welcoming programmes with regular public funding, such as the education budget
- As places for social gatherings are very important for inclusion, these should also be funded on a structural basis too
- Promote public debates on discrimination in employment and schools
- Communication does not only function via traditional forms but many other channels can be used, such as art, music, theatre, etc
- Keep in mind that welcoming spaces are ‘making creative spaces’

**Acknowledgements:** The organisers would like to thank the support of the Welcoming Spaces project leaders; Sabine Meier, former supervisor of WP3, for the moderation of the roundtable and for collecting most of the policy recommendations. Thanks also to all the speakers, and the organisation team, namely our German partner Plattform e.V. (Stephan Rother, Ilse Polakova, and Ann-Kathrin Funke), Sabine Meier, Martin Spitzer and Okka Senst.