



Connected



Resilient



Prosperous

Business incubator in Baćkowice, Poland



SUMMARY

The business incubator in Baćkowice is an initiative developed by the municipality of this small rural area in Poland. It has transformed several buildings abandoned after the closure of various companies during the 2000s into a job creation centre that, in the first years after opening, has managed to employ more than 100 people, mostly women, develop new businesses and services in the area, and create a new transport line connecting the incubator with other nearby rural areas.



CONTEXT

Baćkowice is a small municipality located near the town of Opatów in south-central Poland. For decades, the area has suffered from economic decline and depopulation given its location far from cities with more job opportunities and with the closing of previously existing businesses that left many inhabitants without a job, particularly women. A main source of employment for women in Baćkowice was the sewing room Wólczanka, closed in 2006.

Many women in rural areas often have “housewife” status which, according to the Polish Employment and Counteracting Unemployment Law, means they cannot register in a labour office nor receive any unemployment benefit. Given the lack of other employment opportunities in the area at the time, the municipality of Baćkowice decided to acquire the offices of former companies that had closed in order to convert them into a space that would attract investors and create jobs in the area.



OBJECTIVES

The municipality of Baćkowice designed a project for a **business incubator** to improve conditions for the development of new SMEs in the area after the closure of many businesses. This included providing a space to attract investors and respond to their needs.

For instance, entrepreneurs could decide to rent offices that still needed refurbishment work at a significantly reduced cost. The idea was that these new businesses would generate job opportunities for unemployed citizens, including those from vulnerable groups.

Themes: Transport and mobility, women, social inclusion, entrepreneurship, employment. **Rural revitalisation**

Country: Poland

Organisations: Baćkowice Municipality, public authority

Start & end date: 01/21 - 03/22

Budget: 2,246,000 €

Funding sources: European Regional Development Fund – programming period 2014-2020 and municipality funding

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The mayor of Baćkowice has long ago foreseen that his area can be threatened with depopulation, so has been consistently taking initiatives to prevent this. In 2012, the municipality started to purchase and renovate different old buildings with its own resources.

Nonetheless, this source of funding was not enough to develop the whole incubator project. Finally in 2018, after applying for funds under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) – programming period 2014-2020 – the incubator was created.

The project includes a building with two levels where there is a sewing company. **After successful completion of the first project, the municipality decided to construct another building** with local funding. This was opened in 2022 offering the services of a dental clinic, a barber shop, a restaurant, a rehabilitation centre and a veterinary clinic.



RESULTS

Thanks to the investments made in the first incubator, three companies began operating there, creating more than 100 jobs. The largest company is Wojdak Ltd., a sewing room **employing 80 women in 2023, most of them over 50 years old**, not only from Baćkowice but also from the nearby town Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski. The mayor encouraged a textile entrepreneur who found a niche market (producing uniforms for military and health services) to establish his production in the incubator.

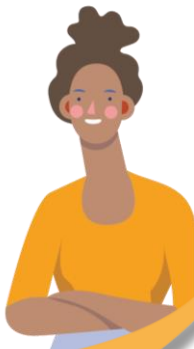
As public transport had disappeared and women from the surrounding villages had no means to get to work, the mayor negotiated with the bus company of the nearby city to move its offices to Baćkowice and pay lower costs and taxes. In return, the bus company opened a connection enabling women to get to the textile plant. As a result, employment and income have increased in the area, reducing the poverty rate, especially among women.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

Behind the success of the incubator there is a committed municipality which has been run since 1989 by the same municipal head, who has earned the **trust of the local community** of the rural area of Baćkowice thanks to listening to people's needs and proactively seeking solutions to tackle issues.

The **municipality took an active role** in pitching the incubator to potential investors from other areas, offering spaces at an attractive cost, **finding different funding sources and acting as a facilitator** with other enterprises, such as the transport company that has made the incubator more accessible.



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