

Old City, Young Residents: Educational Migration and the Renewal of a Historic Academic Town (The Case of Opole)

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Non-metropolitan academic centres are rarely studied as places that receive migrants. Most Polish research on internal migration looks at regions of out-migration, leaving the economic and demographic effects of student inflows largely undescribed. This paper addresses that gap through a case study of Opole — one of the oldest cities in Poland and a historic centre on the Oder, today a non-metropolitan university town with a high rate of studentification. The study asks how educational migration shapes the economic and population situation of the host city in three areas: the local market for goods and services, the labour market, and long-term development. It draws on a review of around 700 Polish and international works, a survey of 730 students (642 of them migrants) and a comparative analysis of public statistics, supported by an income-multiplier model that converts student spending into jobs. The effect is substantial and mostly positive. Student spending reaches roughly 150 million PLN a year, about a quarter of the city's budget, and generates some 355 jobs in the first multiplier phase. It adds around 1,350 new residents and strengthens the local stock of human capital. In this sense, educational migration works as a mechanism of economic and demographic resilience. For historic, non-metropolitan towns facing depopulation, these inflows are an underused resource for sustainable development.

