

CHANGES IN RURAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT RELATED TO POLAND'S ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract. Both the accession of Poland to the EU in 2004 and pre-accession period had a positive influence on changes that occurred in countryside. They particularly concern the movement of rural women, who undertake volunteer activity by implementing projects financed by the EU funds for the behave of women and local communities. At the same time they cooperate with local authorities. However, the rural women's emancipation proceeds differently in comparison with women living in cities and towns. While being rather conservative in moral sphere, rural women are aware of social changes and perceive possibilities of personal development. Voluntary work constitutes an additional occupation for them. The fact that women's organizations became independent is the most important change in the rural women's movement over the last decade.

Key words: rural women's movement, village women's club, women's associations, social activity, European Union, Poland

INTRODUCTION

In relation to the accession of Poland to the European Union some positive changes can be observed in the countryside. Two most important aspects of these changes should be mentioned: economic and social. The second one particularly affects women who become involved in social activity with the people around them and at the same time do not forget about their personal development. The observations and research on changes in the rural women's movement were confirmed during the interviews with local activists, reading the press articles and analysis of websites dedicated to the rural subjects. The examples from the interview records with chairwomen of rural women's organizations from Podkarpackie Region were presented in the part of this article, which concerns descriptions of their current activities¹.

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¹ The following article is a part of a master's thesis written in 2010 at the University of Warsaw under the supervision of dr hab. Agnieszka Rothert. This master's thesis contains the description of changes in the rural women's movement in Poland since establishing the first organizations.

While discussing changes that occurred in the rural women's movement, it is necessary to present the most important factors determining their activity. Firstly, the distinction within the rural women's movement itself should be made. It is a social movement which, at the same time, is one of the tendencies in women's movement in general [Ślęczka 1999, Fuszara 2007]. The rural women's activity is a social activity or, in other words, a civic activity. It can be defined as a sphere of public life reflected in various organizational and legal forms. People acting in this sphere achieve various goals through organizational forms suggested by them [Szustek 2009].

RURAL WOMEN'S SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL SITUATION

In spite of the fact that social family patterns have changed over the last two decades and although the relations between spouses are more and more often based on partnership and the education of women lasts longer, it is difficult for them to be a full-time employee outside the farm. Moreover, women take care of their children and other dependents (e.g. of the elder and disabled family members) [Sawicka 2005]. According to J. Sawicka, the women's position is still influenced by the following factors: education, profession and income. At the same time she pays attention to the fact that "most rural women do not match the traditional image of a rural woman because they make a considerable contribution to the family business" [Sawicka 2005].

On the other hand, there still exists a division of activities that remain a women's domain and those reserved for men. There are two categories of decisions made in rural families: the first ones concern the agricultural production while the other apply to organization of family life and running a household. This distinction suggests that the tasks are divided into male and female ones. For instance, women usually do not interfere in planning the field works since they consider them to be men's domain. It means they withdraw from this area. However they would like to influence the decisions concerning the household budget more often and therefore credit and commercial agreements are negotiated and entered into by both spouses [Kurek 2006]. Thanks to these gradual changes, the relations in rural families are more often based on partnership. The additional factor supporting the transformation of these relations is taking up a job by women outside the household. By doing so their earnings contribute to family income [Kurek 2006].

The approach to the need for rural women's education is also changing. Education is perceived as a chance of development and self-realization. The rural women's educational level is increasing particularly among young women. Nevertheless, rural women are still worse educated in comparison with inhabitants of towns. In 2005 only 3.7% out of all female members of families running a farm who attained the age of 13, received higher education. In the same group 46.2% of women received secondary or post-secondary education. The educational level of the inhabitants of Polish villages considerably increased in comparison with the results of the Agricultural Census conducted in 1996 [Kurek 2006].

As a rule, rural women undertake lower-risk actions which do not require professional knowledge, e.g. they run farm tourism businesses. In order to encourage women to be more active, various attempts are made not only through the actions of state officials and non-governmental organizations providing the information on development possibilities, but also through mass media and TV series in particular [Michalska-Żyła 2008].

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

While considering the issue of the women's movement among the inhabitants of Polish villages, this phenomenon cannot be perceived as separated from the international context. It is crucial especially for the reason that some money which rural women's organizations and other organizations acting for rural women receive, come from the budgets of international organizations. In case of Poland, nowadays most financial resources come from the European Union budget. Additionally these organizations encourage rural women to undertake activities supporting improvement of their social and professional situation.

The international context can be divided into two areas. The first one constitute international women's organizations and international organizations for which the issue of rural women becomes one of the aspect of their activity. The first group includes the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) and the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE).

The second group includes the United Nations Organization and the European Union. The UN undertakes the activity for rural women through the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO). The European Union, within the scope of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), undertakes actions for improvement of the rural women's situation and social activation. The principle of gender mainstreaming (gender equality policy) is implemented within CAP; and also it was included into all common policies in the 1990s. The principles of equal treatment of women and men should be taken into account on every stage of the Rural Development Programme's implementation for 2007–2013². It concerns among other things professional trainings for persons employed in agriculture and forestry, founding micro enterprises and their development as well as the Leader approach.

The Leader program very popular in European rural communities is a territorial, integrated, bottom-up, innovative approach based on partnership. It assumes the local funding arrangements and management as well as supports creating network of organizations involved in implementing the activities within the scope of this program [Gierulska, Augustynowicz 2009]. It also consists in cooperation of the representatives of three sectors: public, economic and social. And the center percentage of women members should be included. The representatives of the sectors mentioned above create the local action groups (LAG) which work out the local development strategies (LDS) as well as are responsible for implementation of the aims suggested therein taking into consideration the guidelines of the Leader approach. The aim of the Leader program is "the activation of the rural areas inhabitants by creating the social potential in the countryside, increasing the potential of financial resources acquisition and taking advantage of them, management improvement of local resources and their indexation" [Rural Development Programme 2007–2013].

There also exist the European Union universal relief program for all the inhabitants of the EU: cohesion policy, in particular the European Social Fund (ESF) which finances Human Capital Operational Programme.

² Rural Development Programme is a strategic document. Each EU member state prepares its own document which reflects the guidelines of the EU CAP. It is implemented during appropriate EU budget period [Szumski 2007].

NOWADAYS SOCIAL ACTIVITY OF RURAL WOMEN IN POLAND

Rural women undertake social activity for local environment more willingly than men or women living in towns. Moreover, they become councilors, chairs of village councils and take part in creating local activity groups. [Psyk-Piotrowska 2008]

The increase of rural woman's social activity is connected with Poland's accession to the European Union. It is the result of necessity to institutionalize the cooperation of public, economic and social sector. Therefore various trainings, workshops, conferences are organized and the principles how to finance the activities and control finances are established [Fuszara 2008]. The organizations wishing to undertake such an activity must have a legal personality. This phenomenon may also be considered in the context of changes in the Polish women's movement in general. The issue of qualitative changes in the Polish women's movement resulting from the accession of Poland to the European Union was taken up by M. Fuszara who claimed that rural women's organizations, which are active nowadays, are the organizations of women, not only for women [Fuszara 2007].

The most widespread rural women's activity is the activity in village women's clubs, which are, by definition, "voluntary, self-governed, independent, apolitical, social and professional organizations of rural women" [Grzebisz-Nowicka 1999]. The village women's clubs are treated by the act of 1982 as the organizational units of agricultural circles. Therefore they have never been and are not independent organizations.

Some of village women's clubs functioning on the basis of the act of 1982 on social-professional organizations of farmers evolve into associations which function on the basis of the act of April 7th, 1989 The Associations Act [the Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland of 1989 No. 20 item 104 as amended]. Additionally they would like to obtain the status of public benefit organization which means they have to comply with the provisions of the act of April 24th, 2003 on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work [the Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland of 2003, No. 96 item 873 as amended] [Raszeja-Ossowska, *Formalno-prawne...* 2010].

There are various organizational forms of village women's clubs which function nowadays: village women's club functioning as organizational entity of a farming circle, as an independent farming circle, as an association (ordinary or registered) [Raszeja-Ossowska, *Źródła...* 2010]. Apart from the types of rural women's organizations mentioned above, the new associations of women also come into being. They conduct similar activity to the activity of the organizations described above.

Having a legal personality enables participation in competitions for projects implemented within the scope of activities financed from the European Union's budget with participation of state financial resources (including the Leader program) as well as applying for grants from non-governmental organizations and local government authorities. Maria Majocha, the president of the Association Village Women's Club "Osada" in Otałęż in Podkarpackie Region, suggested such a solution for the organization she led: "As a result of transformation of the village women's club into an association we are able apply for money necessary to implement various projects. Thanks to the registration, the organization has an entry in the National Court Register and National Business Registry Number (REGON). Without them we could not apply for money from the EU. It is also easier to apply for grants from various organizations and subsidies from the communal budget" [Interview 2].

Rural women are also active in local organizations aims of which are not directly related to subject matter and women's movement. They join the activity of such organizations as voluntary fire brigades, rural sports clubs, church organizations, youth organizations as well as parents' councils functioning near schools. The village councils also constitute significant part of civic life [Kamiński 2009]. In connection with the Poland's accession to the European Union the new social organizations are being established in the rural areas. They belong to a non-governmental organizations sector. Acting as associations or foundations, these organizations run schools, propagate natural and cultural heritage of the region they inhabit. These communities try to adapt to changing living conditions in the country through such an activity [Kamiński 2009]. According to R. Śpiewak, apart from the accession of Poland to the EU, the development of civic society constitutes the additional factor which supports the growth of non-governmental organizations in the country [Śpiewak 2008].

M. Halamska's opinion is that the organizations mentioned above can be characterized by the following features: "focused to the center, without base or support in the area. She thinks that it is difficult to describe them as fully civic organizations: "... in the social reality they have all the features of "appearance" and "façade" which are legitimized by the law and state subsidies" [Halamska 2008]. During the interviews with rural activists I became convinced that one of main incentives for establishment of their associations or for transformation was the possibility to take advantage of various ways in which their activity can be financed. As far as I am concerned, the money constitutes for them rather an instrument which enables them to achieve the goals they set, not an aim in itself.

R. Kamiński is of the opinion that "there is no point in dividing them [i.e. organizations] into "better", "worse", "old" and "new". There are the inhabitants who verify how they functioning" [Kamiński 2009]. Changes in the rural women's activity in their organizations may be analyzed with reference to their membership in the local activity groups (LAG) which are responsible for implementation of local development strategies prepared within the scope of the Leader approach. This initiative has been implemented in Poland since 2004 (EU budget programming period 2000–2006). Seventy out of 150 existing groups were analyzed in terms of the membership in LAG. It turned out that only 10 typical women's organizations, including first of all village women's clubs, belonged to the local groups [Śpiewak 2009]. A similar analysis was conducted in 2009. There were 110 LAG taken into account, which constituted 30% of all LAG existing currently in Poland and chosen to implement the local strategies for the period 2007–2013 they prepared. It was reported that women's organizations were involved into 22 LAG [Ściański, Żak 2009]. The increase of women's involvement in the activity for local communities can be noticed while comparing both programming periods.

Being active, women count on the support of local government authorities. The relations between local government authorities and organizations are of a different character. Sometimes these organizations may count on support in the form of grants for a trip or an event organization [Desperat 2008]. However, there are also other situations. This cooperation does not only concern the implementations of projects requiring financial resources, but also consists in planning, information exchange, negotiating various undertakings and participation in committees [Śpiewak 2008]. I asked my interviewees about the cooperation with local government authorities. Each of them emphasized, that such a cooperation played a very significant role in functioning of the associations they

led. Many members of these organizations are also active in the local government authorities, mainly at commune (gmina) level. However, this cooperation is not always the way the non-governmental organizations wished for [Śpiewak 2008]. Anna Wójcicka, the president of the Women's Association "Victoria" from Górki in Podkarpackie Region complained about the issue of cooperation with local government authorities: "There were no greater difficulties [as regards the establishment of the association] but as usual, everything depended on people, precisely on these people who decided on the existence of our association. At the beginning of our way to register the association, the commune head gave us to understand that our ideas probably resulted from the lack of much serious things to do. (...) It was the district authorities, precisely the department of regional promotion which functions by the district authorities, that helped us the most. The employees of this department willingly provide all the non-governmental organizations with information, organize workshops and trips for us, inform of competitions" [Interview 1].

As a result of the *Diagnosis of the Social and Professional Situation of Rural Women in Poland* conducted in 2008, it was determined that the village women's clubs are the organizations that commune authorities cooperate with the most often (67% of indications). This cooperation is formal as well as informal. The communes cooperate also with the district authorities and they in turn implement, within the scope of their powers, the activities based on partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The partnership between the NGOs and the district authorities is stronger than the partnership at commune level. The cooperation between local government authorities and organizations mentioned above is of a great importance with a view to organizational help, material and financial support from commune and district authorities. It must be emphasized that this cooperation is not permanent. The local government authorities usually cooperate within the scope defined by the provisions of law [Marks 2008]. The recipients of the cooperation for rural women described above were asked for the opinion. It turned out that only 17% of women researched, investigated were satisfied with such a cooperation.

They listed also the most important aims for women's organizations nowadays: counteraction to violence in rural family (70%), counteraction to discrimination on the job market (42%), support for professional activity of rural women (35%), support for access to education for rural women (30%), counteraction to sexual harassment of rural women (27%), support for rural women's entrepreneurship (26%), promoting the pattern of rural family based on partnership (16%), support for social and civic activity of rural women (14%) [Walczak-Duraj 2008].

The representatives of the local government authorities and local organizations indicated the following problems of rural women: access to education and information, health protection, material conditions, job, family, infrastructure, rural women's personal features, social relations in the villages and small towns [Lisek-Michalska 2008].

Discussing the activity of rural women which brings them closer to solving the problems mentioned above, I will compare it to the activities undertaken by such organizations as village women's clubs and women's associations. The issue of activity of rural women cooperating with the Polish Women League will not be discussed. The description of rural women's activity was based on the comparison of their organizations' way of acting presented in Table 1 and supported by additional examples from the interviews conducted with the representatives of rural women's organizations.

Table 1. Comparison of rural women's activity within the scope of their organizations*
 Tabela 1. Zestawienie działań podejmowanych przez kobiety wiejskie w ramach ich organizacji

Rural women's activity		Occurrence in analyzed organizations
Type of activity performed		
Events organization (harvest festivals, fests, feast, trips organized to celebrate Women's Day, Children's Day, Mother's Day, Senior's Day etc.)		35
Preparation of traditional dishes		22
Manufacturing traditional ornaments, craftsmanship, regional art		17
Participation in competitions (for preparation of festive decoration, dish preparation, art reviews, e.g. cabaret contests of rural women's club)		13
Own cabaret, music group, theater group		11
Implementation of financial products financed by the EU (Leader, Human Capital, village revival)		11
Participation in regional promotion during:	events in Poland	7
	events and trade fairs abroad	2
Cooperation with other non-governmental organizations in the village (Voluntary Fire Brigades, organizations for village development)		8
Study visit, cooperation with women's organizations		7
Charity (support for the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity, ill children, purchase of a mammograph)		6
Participation in workshops, courses, lectures (on cuisine, hairdressing, cosmetology)		6
Activity for children and teenagers (equalization of educational chances, workshops)		5
Strengthening of women's entrepreneurship and personal development		5
Propagating prevention checkups		4
Local development, improving image of a region, activities for regional tourism development		4
Development of inhabitants' social activity		4
Preventing small schools from closing, running such schools		3
Organizing exhibitions, memory chambers		3
Organizing social free of charge kindergarten		2
Releasing publications, local newspapers, brochures		2
Activity for elder people		2
Activity for disabled people		2
International cooperation		1

*The data presented in the table were collected on the basis of analysis of 53 women's organizations' characteristics available on website "kobietynawsi.pl". A substantial majority perceives themselves as village women's clubs, the remaining ones are the associations. While analyzing the data presented in the table, it should be taken into account that most of them act in Zachodniopomorskie Region. Thus it is possible that some indications are not reflected in other regions of Poland.

Source: The author's analysis on the basis of characteristics of 53 rural woman organizations presented on website www.kobietynawsi.pl.

Źródło: Opracowanie własne na podstawie charakterystyki 53 organizacji kobiecych na wsi, przedstawionej w portalu: www.kobietynawsi.pl.

The proportions between undertaken activities are changing. Some of the village women's clubs' functions, ones basic, are not implemented any more, for instance distribution of nestlings, seedlings, seeds, the presentation of hygiene principles or running the model households. They nowadays rarely rent dishes or household appliances but more often organize various events, trips and take part in study tours. The most often listed aims, implemented by these organizations, include participating in region promotion and tourism development. It concerns the preparation of local regional food dishes, performance of handicrafts with ornamentation typical for the region with the use of traditional techniques. The establishment of music, theatrical groups and cabarets should also be taken into consideration. Both village women's clubs and rural women's associations participate in the improvement of the country image through cleaning up the area and establishment of parks and playgrounds. There are also workshops and professional courses organized.

Maria Majocho from the Association "Osada" in Otałęż, which implements projects financed from the resources of the Leader program, lists the examples of such activities: "We, the association, managed to establish a playground for children next to the firehouse. We also try to influence the improvement of the our village's image. For instance, we supported the proposal to build the sewage system and we succeeded." [Interview 2]. The women's organizations attempt to keep in their villages small schools, which the authorities intended to close. These organizations sometimes run free of charge, social kindergartens. Apart from the activity for children and teenagers, the rural women's organizations also support elder and disabled people. Various collections of money for charities are also organized. For instance, the Association "Gracja" was engaged in two campaigns: "We collected money for a girl ill with leukemia. Before our theater's performance we announced a spontaneous collection for rehabilitation of a girl from neighboring village who had an accident on her way to work" [Interview 3]. Six out of 53 organizations taken into account in the following comparison conducted charitable activities. They helped ill children, supported the purchase of a mammograph, organized collections for the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity³.

It is worth emphasizing that rural activists are very business oriented. Apart from the fact that they know how and where to apply for financial support, they are able to earn money – they sell groceries they prepared, but also doilies, tablecloths and other products. "We also can earn money, but these sums are not very big. However it is enough to cover the costs of our activity. For example we can sell our products on fairs and fests. We managed to earn about 1000 PLN on one of such trade fests. Moreover, we prepared food for 60 people during street art festival organized by the Association J'ARTE from

³ The Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity is a Polish foundation, whose aim consists in working in the field of health protection by saving patients' and especially young patients' life as well as supporting their treatment. Additionally, the Foundation promotes health and medical prevention. It pursues this aim by organizing the annual money collections, by purchasing medical equipment for Polish hospitals and by running five nation-wide medical programs and one educational program. [http://www.en.wosp.org.pl/foundation#What_do_we_do_]

Mielec last year, which also significantly contributed to our budget”, emphasizes Józefa Śpiewak [Interview 3].

The women's organizations also support their candidates for chairs of the village councils (sołtys), councilors and representatives of commune authorities. It happens in associations led by my interviewees from Podkarpacie Region – among their members there are chairs of the village councils, councilors, representatives of commune authorities. A similar situation takes place in a village located near Bydgoszcz. Elżbieta Saj is the chairperson of the village council (sołtys) and the head of village women's club. “There are a dozen or so women in the club at present. The youngest one is about twenty, the eldest – in her fifties. It is us who control the village. Admittedly, I am the chair of the village council, but of course all the decisions are made by the club.”, she says [Iwanciw, Lewińska 2010].

The women conducting their activity in the villages located far from metropolitan areas complain that the distance to administrative centers is too long. For this reason they concentrate mainly on the local activities. “We cooperate with women's associations from our nearest neighborhood. We do not have formalized projects. Our common actions are based, for example, on organizing common trips and courses. We have visited the villages where the befriended organizations act and we presented our theater performance there” [Interview 3]. Maria Majocha from the Association “Osada” particularly appreciates cooperation at the district forum: “Most often we cooperate within the area of our district. (...) We also appreciate cooperation with “PROWENT” Local Action Group [Interview 2].

It follows from the picture of rural women's social activity presented above that this process had a positive influence on organizations as well as on women who conduct their activity more and more boldly and try to influence the inhabitants of their villages. It cannot be said that the rural women's mentality changed markedly since they remain very conservative in moral sphere. However they are aware of their value and perceive being a woman as a huge advantage.

CONCLUSIONS

The attitude of rural women towards the roles they fulfill has changed under the influence of social changes and strengthening role of the women's movement. Once having been dependent on men, they become independent and are active in various organizations now. Of course it does not mean that they do not take into account their husbands' opinions but they treat them rather as advisors. Since women fulfill many various roles, they are able to organize their lives in a better way and find time for social activity. In spite of all changes that occurred in the country, there still exists the division into activities performed by men and women. Crucial is the fact that over the last years the organizations of rural women have become the organizations of women, not only for women. It means that they are established and fully led by women and that women are able to make use of all accessible possibilities.

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Interview 1 with Anna Wójcicka – the chair of the village council Górki, the president of the Women's Association „Victoria”, 12 February 2010

Interview 2 with Maria Majocha – the president of the Association Village Women's Club “Osada” in Otałęż, the commune councilor of Czermin, the activist of the Polish People's Party, 16 May 2010.

Interview 3 with Józefa Śpiewak – the president of the Women' Association “Gracja” in Czermin, 16 May 2010.

ZMIANY W RUCHU KOBIEŃ WIEJSKICH W ZWIĄZKU Z PRZYSTĄPIENIEM POLSKI DO UNII EUROPEJSKIEJ

Streszczenie. Przystąpienie Polski do UE w 2004 roku, jak również przygotowania do akcesji pozytywnie wpłynęły na zmiany, jakie zaistniały na wsi. Jest to szczególnie widoczne w odniesieniu do ruchu kobiet wiejskich, które prowadząc działalność społeczną, realizują projekty finansowane między innymi z funduszy europejskich, zarówno na rzecz kobiet, jak również społeczności lokalnych. Współpracują przy tym z władzami lokalnymi. Emancypacja kobiet wiejskich przebiega jednak nieco inaczej niż w przypadku kobiet mieszkających w miastach. Kobiety wiejskie pozostając bardzo konserwatywnymi w sferze obyczajowej, mają świadomość zmian społecznych i dostrzegają możliwości rozwoju osobistego. Praca społeczna jest dla nich dodatkowym zajęciem. Warto podkreślić, że najważniejsza zmiana w ruchu kobiet wiejskich w ostatnich latach polega na usamodzielnieniu się organizacji kobiecych.

Słowa kluczowe: kobieta, ruch kobiet, ruch kobiet wiejskich, koło gospodyń wiejskich, stowarzyszenie, działalność społeczna, Unia Europejska, Polska

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