Rural women - new roles, new activities

Sylwia Michalska

Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development
Polish Academy Sciences
Social roles

Social role is one of the basic issues studied by sociology, and the way in which individuals perform their social roles is an important source of knowledge about the society.

Each social role is the construct of expectations, connected with some certain social status. It is a list of rights and obligations which are consequence of individual’s social place. Each social role has some special obligations, restrictions but also some place to improvisation.

In the changing social reality, the analysis of social roles – their formation, social expectations related with them, but also the way the roles are performed and interpreted – may be an important indicator of the direction of the ongoing changes, as well as of the way they are perceived.

Observation of changes or rural women roles might be important source of information about changing structure, values, norms, relations in society.
Strong traditional role model

- Source of traditional role model - rural areas and rural communities in Poland

- The traditional role of rural women was constructed of homework, obligations of taking care of family members, often also work in family farm, biological explanation of different activities.

- Priorities and system of values changed in time, often by adding new activities and obligations, not by replacement one role by another. Very slow transformation of existing roles.
Rural women hierarchy of values

- Research in 2013 (Konsorckjum Badawcze Focus Group) tried to reconstruct system of values of rural women today (N=3200).
- Majority of participant declared that most important value, they would like to realized in life are:
  - family, and family values (more than 80%),
  - social activity and mission(45,5%),
  - independence and lack of responsibility (39%)
  - individualism (38,6%).
Less women declared, that values like: power, making decisions, professional career and personal growth are most important to them.
Rural women’s social and political activity

- Representation of women in politics: there are only 25.4% female members of councils in rural communes and 24.9% in rural-urban and 26.6% in towns, only 18.7% in powiat (province) councils.

- The number of women – sołtys (chef of the village) is changing, now there is about 30% of female sołtys. But it is not a function which gives a real power, it is a lot of obligations and very symbolical remuneration, it is often non-paid, voluntary work for local community (Matysiak, 2009-2011).

- Activity in NGOs – voluntary work, not in the structures.

- Lack of time, home duties, economic problems, cultural and social norms in social group, stigmatization (Walczak-Duraj, 2008).
Professional activity

- Although rural women are **better educated** than men, they have difficulties with finding work on rural areas (lack of appropriate posts, problems with communication to towns)
- Women are less active than men on the labor market. In 2009 the rate of employment for women 42.2%, for men 59.8%; rate of unemployment for women was 9.1%, for men 7.2%.
- Responsibility for family economic situation in economical crisis (**feminisation of poverty**)
- Only 20% PROW beneficiaries 2007-2013 were women
Social expectations - active rural women in media

Source: www.kobiety nawsi.pl.
Website dedicated to active rural women

Examples used by Ministry of Agriculture for promotion of rural women activity, exhibition

25 stories, 30 women

Different ages, less at their 20s and 60s

Most of them have families: husbands, children, grandchildren

11 were born and raised in cities, moved to rural areas looking for slower life or alternative professional career
Different activities – mostly connected with traditional female fields of activity (cooking, care – children, elderly people, cultural activities, protection of landscape and environment.

Formal activity in KGW (Rural Female Organizations), LAGs, Sołtys.

Not visibly present on posts connected with real power.

Some of presented active rural women are they produce jewellery, embroidery, entrepreneurs, but their activity is also connected with „female activities”, honey, alcohol of fruits, fruit and herbal teas, they cultivate traditions of region.

Other presented activity is typically female role of taking care person. Presented women take care of children, elderly people, victims of aggression, addicted persons.
Conclusions

- Women living in rural areas declare that they appreciate values close to the traditional model.
- At the same time rural women are open to take occasion and **perform new social roles**.
- The old model of traditional roles is changing rather slowly, slow changes inside rural families.
- Change of roles or **accumulation/multiplication of roles**?
- More professional and social activities, responsibility for economic situation of the family in case of poverty, informal and not connected with political or economical power activities.
- Although rural areas are no more so rural the model of traditional role performance is still strong.
- Different types of rural areas – different models?
Thank you for your attention

Sylwia Michalska
sibia@wp.pl