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## *The Role of Crafts in the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas*

"Well, then speak," she asks. "Where do we send Agnisia?" ...  
"I would," he says at last, "put her in a school of crafts..."  
"Have you not God in your heart?" Barbara interjected. "... to push your own  
children to be shoemakers while being so prosperous?..."  
"... I'm not pushing anyone to be a shoemaker. There are various professions  
suitable for women. Let her learn photography, bookbinding...'

Maria Dąbrowska, *Nights and Days*

### ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to indicate the need for a diagnosis of socio-cultural conditions of running a craft business by women. Local handicraft, culinary traditions, etc. are also an important resource for the development of women's entrepreneurship with a craft profile. The problems of the article include the 'common set' of two research areas: crafts and women's entrepreneurship in rural areas. The focus of the paper will be on the issue of the functioning of crafts in rural areas based on an empirical analysis of the scale of functioning of craft enterprises run by women. Concurrently, the subject outlined in this way is related to other issues, such as counteracting depopulation of rural areas

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based on the activation of local entrepreneurship. The potential of women's entrepreneurship development in rural areas should also be indicated, among others, by tightening cooperation between Country Housewives' Associations (*kola gospodyń wiejskich*, KGWs) and crafts organisations.

The social effects of cooperation between crafts and KGWs will result in stimulation of entrepreneurship (especially female entrepreneurship) in rural areas, which will then contribute to rural development. These effects support the creation of new forms of small and medium entrepreneurship corresponding to social economy, which are defined as an element of creative economy. This will trigger the process of creating new jobs and may constitute an important mode of support for vocational education, increasing the chance for the local youth to smoothly enter the labour market. Likewise, the generation of local human and social capital resources cannot be overestimated. By mobilising and integrating key actors in the area, it will contribute to better management of local resources.

*KEYWORDS: rural areas; crafts; local development; rural women; country housewives' associations.*

## INTRODUCTION

Countrywomen's entrepreneurship based on craft skills is not just a contemporary issue. The quoted dialogue from *Nights and Days* by Maria Dąbrowska points to the seemingly invariably current dilemmas concerning women's entrepreneurship in the countryside. This is indicated, among other things, by the study *Sytuacja kobiet w rolnictwie i na obszarach wiejskich. Specyfika, standardy, parytety i oczekiwania* (*The situation of women in agriculture and rural areas: Uniqueness, standards, parities and expectations*), the results of which were published in 2012. Data from a decade ago indicated higher levels of female labour force participation in urban areas than in rural areas in the EU countries. A relatively high rate of self-employment among women is also characteristic, placing Poland in the fifth place in Europe after Greek, Italian, Croatian and Portuguese women (Durka et al., 2012, p. 3). The studies indicated aspirations for secondary education (which had

already been acquired by nearly 55% of women at that time) and higher education (more than 15% of women in rural areas had completed higher education) (Durka et al., 2012, p. 5), neglecting the advantages of craft qualifications, the first step of which is to acquire the title of a journeyman. The results of this research are in line with the negative perception of vocational education and craft career paths marked in Poland since the 1990s. This was reflected in the effects of the education reform, which took place in 1999 and marginalised the role of vocational education to the so-called “last chance” schools (Osiecka-Chojnacka, 2007), leading as far as to the stigmatisation of this educational path.

However, the increase in the popularity of first-level vocational education from 13% to 17% of the relevant age group in the 2019/2020–2020/2021 school years provides an opportunity to develop women’s craft entrepreneurship in rural areas. Therefore, this segment of female entrepreneurship requires an in-depth analytical reflection within the broad picture of women running businesses in Poland (cf. Klimek, 2020; Michalska, 2013; Knapik, 2008). Present-day rural areas are not only agricultural in character, but they also feature a developing sector of services and production based on micro and small entrepreneurship. The importance of enterprises associated in crafts guilds should be emphasized against this background. The distinctive feature of such undertakings is the possibility of on-the-job training within the framework of dual training. Thus, the advantage of craft enterprises run by women in rural areas involves not only business activity, but also “reproduction of female entrepreneurship” through a practical transfer of experience during vocational training. Out of 76 thousand apprentices in Polish crafts in 2019, a third is represented by women. The same is true for the proportion of women and men among the 23,000 master craftsmen in training.

That picture should be supplemented with a statement that young people from the countryside choose vocational education in the workplace to a significantly greater extent than their urban

peers. In view of the demands of the labour market, however, this is not a burden but an asset on the threshold of a professional path, including the possibility of running one's own business.

The aim of the article is to indicate the need for a diagnosis of socio-cultural conditions of running a craft business by women. Local handicraft, culinary traditions, etc. are also an important resource for the development of women's entrepreneurship with a craft profile.

The problems of the article include the "common set" of two research areas: crafts and women's entrepreneurship in rural areas. The focus of the paper will be on the issue of the functioning of crafts in rural areas based on an empirical analysis of the scale of functioning of craft enterprises run by women. At the same time, the subject outlined in this way is related to other issues, such as counteracting depopulation of rural areas based on the activation of local entrepreneurship. The potential of women's entrepreneurial development in rural areas should also be indicated, among others, by tightening cooperation between country housewives' Associations and crafts organisations. The spheres that need to be elaborated on in the first place in the framework of this cooperation are:

- a) arts & crafts,
- b) craft business, e.g. in professions such as hairdressing, cooking, confectionery,
- c) and, lastly, dual vocational training. Acquiring qualifications of journeyman and master craftsman, which enables the holders to educate next generations of young, female professionals from rural areas.

The topic of the article include a synthetic presentation of the craft and the emphasis of the role of women within it. On the other hand, the empirical part is based on the analysis of the scale of functioning of craft enterprises run by women in rural areas on the basis of data from crafts guilds.

## CRAFTS – ECONOMY AND EDUCATION

Due to the specifics of their operation, craft enterprises and craft organisations can be innovative not only due to the availability of modern equipment, machines and technologies. The role of crafts in the dynamically developing creative economy is based on a complex cultural heritage reaching far into the past. Special emphasis should also be placed on the skill acquisition model based on “learn through work” vocational training that ensures the continuity of “craft experience”. This type of skills profile is widely used in the labour market, as confirmed by the results of research indicating that craft skills are used in creative and other sectors of the economy.

Dual or alternate education should be seen as a natural investment in the future, in order to build a new pool of future professionals who will supply the potential of companies. Craft vocational training is an example of a classic dual vocational training system. It combines apprenticeship in a craftsman’s workshop in the working process (based on a contract of employment as provided for in the Labour Code), further education in school (theoretical education as provided for in the Act on the Education System), and supervision of the craft organisation over the course of such vocational training (Act on Crafts). Learning within a craft is a well-known and common method of acquiring professional skills and qualifications. Not only small and medium craft enterprises play an important role in this process, but also craft organizations such as guilds, craft chambers and Polish Craft Association. The purpose of a craft apprenticeship is for the young worker to acquire the practical skills and theoretical knowledge necessary for responsible occupation, either as an employee or in the context of self-employment. Craft vocational preparation of juvenile workers concerns school and non-school occupations and is connected with vocational training leading to the attainment of journeyman qualification.

One of the most important tasks of craft organisations is to teach vocational skills. Craftsmen confirm their professional qualifications by passing journeyman and master craftsman examinations, and a craftsman with a master's title is allowed to train their own apprentices. Crafts involve a wide range of training from cutting-edge to unique professions, especially those of an artistic and handicraft nature. Nowadays in Poland, about 76 thousand students are trained in over 130 professions by craftsmen-employers. Between 1945 and 2018, more than 2.2 million journeyman certificates and nearly 525,000 master craftsman diplomas were issued. Some basic data may be quoted in order to illustrate the scale of activity of craft organisations in Poland:

Table 1. The Polish Craft Association as an employer.

Polish Craft Association as an employer's organization represents interests of micro, small and medium enterprises – not only of its members but also the entire SME sector	32 chambers   487 guilds
Number of craft enterprises training students and/or employing juvenile workers for vocational training in 2019	23,667
Number of juvenile workers employed in craft enterprises for vocational training in 2019	76,257 <b>30.54% women</b> 69.46% men
Number of candidates who took journeyman examinations before the examination boards of craft chambers in 2019.	27,942

Source: Polish Craft Association, [www.zrp.pl](http://www.zrp.pl).

Table 2. Number of juvenile workers employed for vocational training in craft enterprises in 2019.

	Total	Women	Men
Vocational training	75,505	32.38%	67.62%
Apprenticeship	752	15.15%	84.85%
Total	76,257	30.54%	69.46%

Source: Polish Craft Incubator. Own elaboration based on educational information of the Polish Craft Association.

Table 3. Journeyman examinations taken before examination boards of craft chambers in 2019.

			Total	Women	Men
Vocational training graduates	pass	17,903	20,188	29.16%	70.84%
	fail	2,285			
Candidates for a vacancy	pass	7,602	7,754	52.34%	47.66%
	fail	152			

Source: Polish Craft Incubator. Own elaboration based on educational information of the Polish Craft Association

Table 4. Master craftsman examinations taken before examination boards of craft chambers in 2019.

		Total	Women	Men
Pass	2,484	2,606	28.74%	71.56%
Fail	122			

Source: Polish Craft Incubator. Own elaboration based on educational information of the Polish Craft Association.

For comparison, we can refer to the data from Germany, where about 30% of vocational education is provided in crafts. It should also be noted that there are almost one million German craft enterprises employing over 5.4 million people. Among men, the most popular craft occupations are car mechanic, electronics engineer

and sanitary and heating fitter. Hairdressing and catering were most popular among women. It has also been pointed out that approx. 70% of the employees in the German craft sector are people who have been educated through on-the-job training (Müller & Thomä, 2015, p. 7). The scale of activity of German crafts makes them one of the pillars of the German economy within the framework of service and production business, acting as “employers and teachers of the profession”. The professions most frequently chosen by women in the German crafts are hairdresser, optician, confectioner and dental technician, while men most often choose the professions of automotive mechatronics technician, electronics technician and mechanic for sanitary, heating and air conditioning installations and equipment (Göbel, 2021).

Another example from Germany is the nationwide campaign for the promotion of vocational training among girls called Girls Day, which covers the craft trades (compiled from [www.girls-day.de](http://www.girls-day.de)). Since 2001, this series of events has been held every fourth Thursday in April throughout Germany. The Girls Day project is co-financed by the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth Affairs and by the European Social Fund. A number of organisations are also involved in the project, notably the Central Association of German Crafts and the German Trade Union Association as well as the Federation of German Industries.

Training of young workers in Poland is co-financed by the Labour Fund. Compared to their German counterparts, however, students only receive “pocket money” – PLN 250 per month on average. Taking into account the purchasing power of money, students in Germany receive over 3 times more than Polish students for their apprentice work. The greatest benefit for Polish students is the prospect of finding employment in a company where they will acquire practical training. Employers can also apply for PLN 8081 funding for on-the-job training. The prerequisite, however, is passing a professional exam. The entrepreneur



may also be reimbursed for the apprentice's wages and social security contributions by the Voluntary Labour Corps. At present, the craftsmen environment enjoys the largest share of the dual training in Poland – about 80% of students with the status of juvenile workers.

The application of the dual education system in Germany has led to the economic success of the country and has brought positive international feedback for the country in the field of vocational education. The vocational education obtained by our neighbours is highly respected and practically constitutes a guarantee of finding employment. At the same time, this education system provides students with great opportunities for growth. Individuals interested in gaining more theoretical knowledge have the opportunity to take the right steps to apply for higher education (Skarzynski, 2015, pp. 158–160). Broad opportunities should encourage young people to take up education in the dual system, as it provides opportunities for development and does not preclude a change of career path. Concurrently, the professional experience that young people can gain during their education appeals to entrepreneurs.

As shown in a study commissioned by the European Parliament entitled "Dual Education: A bridge over troubled waters?", apprenticeship programmes contribute to the employment of young people and reduce youth unemployment. In this context, the European Commission has called on the Member States to step up their efforts to provide world-class vocational education and training to improve the quality of vocational skills. It also encourages the promotion of work-based learning, including quality internships, apprenticeships and dual-track training systems (European Parliament, 2014). A group of 19 countries and the European Union, commonly known as the G20, promotes the belief that vocational education can have a positive impact on reducing unemployment and ensuring a stable growth in economies that have been affected by the global crisis (Stepnikowski,

2016, p. 36). The European Union considers the implementation of vocational education as one of the prerequisites for the economic development of the Member States, therefore it has established the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, which supports the European Commission, the Member States and the social partners by providing expertise in the form of research, policy analysis and networking (CEDEFOP, 2014).

An unquestionable advantage of dual education is its flexibility, owing to which the skills of young people and the employed staff are shaped according to the requirements of the economy. The entire learning process is guided by one objective – to meet the economic needs of the current period. Thus, as the economy changes, curricula, fields of study and teaching methods should follow accordingly. It is the only teaching system in which education responds directly to economic change. Direct and on-going, as the institutions in charge of overseeing the dual education system in various countries work with numerous actors to coordinate economic trends and teaching in schools and businesses. It can be pointed out that in the dual system the educational cycle and the processes occurring in the economy are interdependent elements which mutually react to changes occurring in their structures. In order to do so, all trends have to be properly monitored (Skarżyński, 2015, pp. 17–19).

Dual training is an answer to the problems of small and medium-sized enterprises, which do not have sufficient resources to be able to attract qualified employees. The latter usually choose to work for large companies, with a much larger scope of influence. Dual education could provide small and medium-sized firms with new staff while stabilizing their precarious situation (Skarżyński, 2015, pp. 137–139).

Craft-based vocational training can also be a response to the challenges of EU cohesion policy. Being the providers of lifelong learning, craft enterprises can significantly contribute to the improvement of the situation of persons excluded from the labour

market. This category will particularly include women from rural areas, especially those with a peripheral location. An example of the effectiveness of such activities is the Kobieta-Zawodowiec (Woman Professional) programme, discussed later in this text, which promotes craft qualifications among women returning to the labour market after a break due to childbirth/parenting.

#### CRAFT BUSINESSES RUN BY WOMEN IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Craft businesses associated in guilds run by women in rural areas are usually located in rural *gminas*, which are at the same time social and economic centres on a local scale. As indicated by the analysis of companies run by women and associated in the Sundry Crafts Guild (SCG) in Wagrowiec, the service providers operating in Wagrowiec itself as the *powiat* capital is dominant in terms of numbers. However, in the hairdressing and cosmetics sector, dominated in 100% by women, 5 out of 18 establishments are located in rural areas, complementing the service range of Wagrowiec as a *powiat* service centre.

With regard to craft enterprises, including those run by women, it should be noted that the administrative handling of on-the-job training provided by the guild is an important pragmatic motivation for joining a craft organisation. This is due to the fact that hairdressing, perceived as largely “women’s profession”, is chosen by female graduates of primary schools who decide to study at level 1 vocational schools (formerly: basic vocational schools). Apprenticeship training at the workplace requires administrative support, which is provided by the trade guilds for affiliated companies under the membership fee.

It is important to consider succession and other internal and external conditions in the functioning of women-led businesses. Without elaborating on this topic in the presented article, it is nevertheless possible to indicate cases of family-run craft compa-

nies taken over by women, who have no formal trade education, but due to succession requirements and with the support of their families take over these businesses and achieve success. It is also necessary to emphasize the dynamic development of the service market in rural areas in sectors in which a significant share is held by firms run by women, for example, hairdressing and cosmetic services. Such a situation creates a significant potential for the development of economic activity outside powiat capitals.

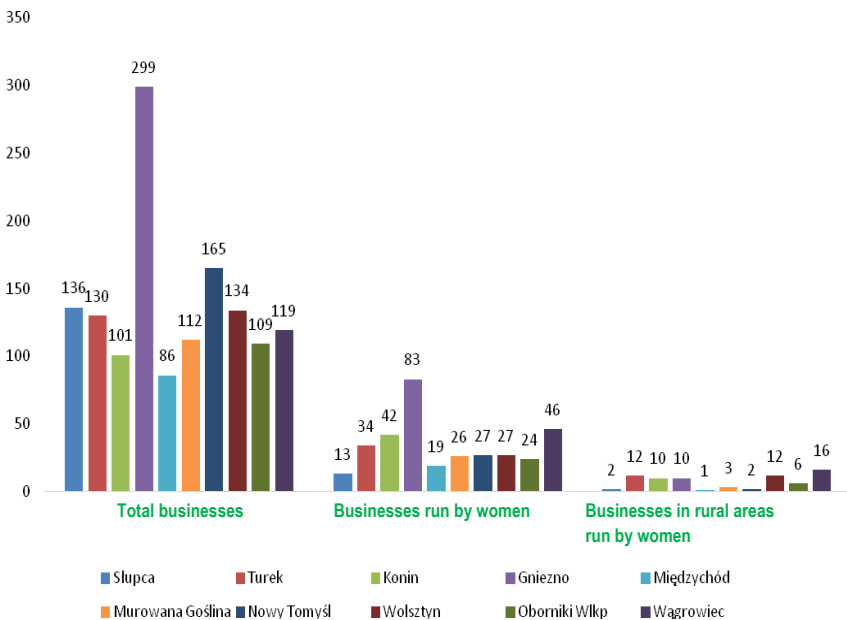
Another issue worth emphasizing is the role of women in the functioning of crafts organizations, whose boards, as well as the whole organization, are dominated by men. However, despite their 30% share in the total number of craft enterprises, women do not meet the “parity” requirement at this level in the governing bodies of craft organisations. Therefore, this is also an area for in-depth analyses of the dynamics of change in this regard, including the role of women from rural areas.

In order to enhance the empirical picture of women’s entrepreneurship in rural areas, some data from crafts guilds in Wielkopolska Voivodeship is presented below. The rationale behind the choice of this region is that Wielkopolska hosted the largest number of craft apprenticeship training providers employing young workers for vocational training in 2019, namely 5,417. The next voivodeships in terms of the number of craft enterprises were Silesian Voivodeship (3,578) and Małopolska Voivodeship (2,084). Data on women’s entrepreneurship from other selected crafts guilds in Wielkopolska will allow us to approximate its scale, and the analysis of the number of companies associated within guilds, type of industry (on the basis of the nomenclature used in guilds) as well as the number of companies run by women, including women in rural areas, will make it possible to present the current status of “female entrepreneurship” on the local scale in comparison with other companies associated in craft organisations.

The functioning of women's craft entrepreneurship in rural areas is exemplified, among others, by Sundry Crafts Guild in Wągrowiec (over 200 associated companies) and a list of companies run by women broken down by industry (SCG, Wągrowiec, May 30, 2021). Out of 45 undertakings associated within the SCG in Wągrowiec, 16 are run by women. In the area of operation of the SCG in Słupca, the largest number of women-led businesses is in the cosmetics industry – 13, including two in rural areas. Only one company in the automotive industry is currently run by a woman. In other sectors, no women were recorded as owners of companies located in the countryside (SCG, Słupca, May 30, 2021). In the area of the SCG in Turek, the largest number of women-led businesses is in the cosmetics industry – 26, including 10 in rural areas. In the automotive industry, four companies are currently run by women (one jointly with her husband), including two in rural areas. There is one company run by a woman in the wood crafts sector and three in the food sector (SCG, Turek, May 30, 2021). In the area of the SCG in Konin, the largest number of women-led businesses is in the cosmetics industry – 26, including five in rural areas. In the food industry, seven businesses owned by women were identified, including four in the rural area. In the woodworking industry, one company is run by a woman in a rural area (SCG, Konin, May 30, 2021). In the area covered by the Sundry Crafts and Entrepreneurship Guild in Gniezno, the largest number of women-led businesses is in the cosmetics industry – 50, including seven in rural areas. In the retail industry, eight businesses are run by women, including one in a rural area. In the field of transport and vehicle mechanics – five companies are run by women, of which two in rural areas (based on data from the Sundry Crafts and Entrepreneurship Guild in Gniezno, May 30, 2021). In the SCG in Międzychód, most companies are run by women in the cosmetics industry – 7. In the food industry, three businesses are run by women, including one in a rural area. In the retail industry, 8 out of 10 companies are run by women,

and in the “agricultural” sector one out of two companies is run by a woman (SCG, Miedzzychód, May 30, 2021). In the SCG in Murowana Goślina, the largest number of women-led businesses (eight) is in the cosmetics industry. In the retail industry, 12 businesses are run by women, including three in a rural area. In the food sector, five out of 13 companies are run by women (SCG, Murowana Goślina, May 30, 2021). In the area of the SCG in Tomyśl, the largest number of women-led businesses is in the cosmetics industry – 18, including two in rural areas. Other industries include four companies owned by women. In the area of the Sundry Crafts Guild in Wolsztyn, the largest number of women-led businesses is in the cosmetics industry – 18, including eight in rural areas. In the food industry, 7 businesses are run by

Figure 1. Number of businesses run by women in Wielkopolska Voivodeship.



Source: Own elaboration based on data from various crafts guilds in Poland.

women, including two in a rural area. In the locksmith industry, one company is run by a woman in the rural area, the same as in the transport and vehicle mechanics industry (SCG, Tomyśl, May 30, 2021). Finally, in the area where the SCG in Oborniki Wielkopolskie operates, most businesses are run by women in the hairdressing and cosmetics sector – 7, including one in rural areas (SCG, Oborniki Wielkopolskie, May 30, 2021).

The above data indicate the importance of the role of crafts in the contemporary local and, consequently, national economy. Their significance is already visible in the sheer number of craft companies, with their significant share in the SME sector. Over 3.8 million small and medium-sized enterprises are registered in Poland, which jointly employ 6.6 million people. They account for over 99% of all Polish companies and produce around 40 percent of the gross domestic product (<https://zrp.pl/o-nas/stuktura/przedsiębiorstwa-rzemieslnicze>). The craft industry is the largest structure associating economic operators in Poland, with at least 300,000 workers employed by companies belonging to craft organisations.

#### “CRAFT IS A WOMAN” – RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

As part of the review of research and examples of good practice in Poland regarding the functioning of women in the crafts, it is necessary to cite the project *Kobieta-Zawodowiec* (The Woman Professional), implemented nationwide from June 2013 to December 2014 by the Polish National Forum for Career Counselling. Its main objective was to promote vocational education, including craftsmanship qualifications, among people returning to the labour market after a break due to childbirth/parenthood by identifying good practices and conducting a nationwide information and promotional campaign. Qualitative research has shown that the respondents most often included the economic situation or

crisis in the industry as one of the main barriers to their business activity. These statements are in line with the opinions expressed by other entrepreneurs.

However, women's professional success is also determined by family relationships. Sometimes women's social and professional activity is not accepted by their environment. In the country, gender stereotypes are perpetuated, and there is strict social control. Women are socialized to act as managers of the family in terms of provisioning, health care, education and upbringing, leisure arrangements and household finances. Any non-standard behaviour is either rejected or not taken seriously (cf. Walczak-Duraj, 2008; Dziekanowska, 2017, among others). Such behaviours include women's social involvement, perceived by others as extravagant, and running a business if it is motivated by non-economic factors, e.g. a desire for self-development or financial independence. Men in particular tend to have a traditional view of women's roles and a stereotypical attitude towards women. Furthermore, inadequacies in social infrastructure in rural areas make women additionally burdened with caring for grandchildren and elderly family members.

Research on members of Country Housewives' Associations clearly indicates that there is a need for self-expression among countrywomen. This desire is fulfilled in KGWs and various associations, and membership in such organizations is an incentive to leave the comfort zone, overcome fatigue and passivity. It provides the motivation to make an effort and helps stay disciplined in pursuing one's goals. Women support each other in their activities, and their collaboration helps them learn from one another (Dziekanowska, 2017). These ambitions represent the potential for women to take up craft activities.

The positive image of women dealing with crafts is an advantageous situation in the context under discussion. They often prove to be better employees than men, which was also emphasized by the latter during the study. It is worth emphasizing that there



is no one specific image of a craftswoman. Women tend to be concentrated in specific industries, mainly tailoring, hairdressing, catering. The respondents categorized women and men as employees with certain characteristics and aptitudes for the profession. In many statements, especially those made by men, one can notice traces of stereotypical thinking according to which gender and predispositions connected with it are the main determinant of the occupation performed. In the opinion of the respondents, women working in the above mentioned professional categories are very valuable employees. It has been repeatedly pointed out that a craftswoman is conscientious, focused on achieving her goal, as well as full of passion and commitment to her profession. Another interesting aspect is women working in crafts, especially in niche professions. Such a professional is often seen as an expert with a narrow specialization. In this case gender makes no difference. It is also worth noting that the existing divisions in craft-related occupations into more feminine and more masculine are slowly disappearing. New technologies that eliminate the need for physical force is the most frequent reason for this.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The presented empirical background of the activity of craftswomen in rural areas indicates the concentration of this economic activity in specific industries, especially hairdressing. The crafts guilds included in the analysis presented the number of companies run by women. At the same time, it seems that the scale of economic activity in the countryside is not satisfactory from the point of view of development needs and market potential of "local Poland". The data presented in the paper point to the need for greater sectoral diversification of women's economic activity and more entrepreneurship in rural areas. The combination of KGW

activities with the participation of craft organisations create such an opportunity.

Country Housewives' Associations are voluntary, self-governing and independent social and professional women's organizations operating mainly in rural areas. These associations are a Polish phenomenon, which has no equivalent in other European countries. They date back to the mid-19th century and their activities throughout the organisation's existence were of an educational nature, they supported the process of modernising households and farms and improved the living conditions of the rural population. For many years, they had the character of spontaneous and grassroots initiatives. The legal basis for the operation of the circles is the Act on Country Housewives' Associations of 29 November 2018. It provides that a KGW has legal personality and is subject to registration in the National Register of Country Housewives' Associations. The entry is made by the President of the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture (ARiMR). A KGW can obtain a grant for its activities from the ARiMR.

Analysing the activities of the KGWs so far, we can point out the following salient aspects:

- educational traditions: until World War II, KGWs carried out practical activities to educate and broaden knowledge of household management; they ran trainings, presentations and courses on a variety of subjects including: baking and cooking, meat and fruit processing, poultry breeding, vegetable growing, hygiene and rational nutrition, cutting and sewing or the importance of women in social life; the high standard of the courses and exchange of experience and information between the circles was ensured by specially trained instructors;
- orientation towards innovations: in the Polish People's Republic they supported the process of modernisation of households and farms and strove to improve the living conditions of country people;

- developing women's entrepreneurship;
- increasing the participation of the inhabitants of rural areas in culture and folklore cultivation.

The current key KGW activities are: culinary (92% of KGWs), handicraft and fine arts (77%) and educational activities – organizing training and workshops (28%). With increasing frequency, Country Housewives' Associations undertake to promote regional products (22%).

Craft companies are also characterized by a high potential for innovation, which is realized through:

- access to modern equipment, machinery and technology;
- taking its roots from a complex cultural heritage reaching far into the past, which defines the fundamental role of crafts in the dynamically developing creative economy;
- dual training, which combines apprenticeship with a crafts-person (employment contract as defined in the Labour Code) in the work process, further education at school (theoretical education pursuant to the Education System Act), supervision of the craft organization throughout such vocational training (pursuant to the Crafts Act);
- vocational preparation of juvenile workers in crafts that concerns school and non-school occupations and is connected with vocational training leading to the attainment of journeyman qualification;
- teaching a profession and obtaining a professional qualification through journeyman and master craftsman examinations, which then allows the craftsman with the master's title train their own students;
- crafts involve a wide range of training, from cutting-edge to unique professions, especially those of an artistic and handicraft nature.

Country Housewives' Associations may partner with craft organisations in the field of trade education, particularly in the field of gastronomy, confectionery, as well as arts and crafts (e.g. weav-

ing, lace-making, embroidery, etc.). Arts and crafts, also known as applied arts, deals with the production of utilitarian objects of high aesthetic value. They are produced in artisan workshops, from the best materials, using traditional, mostly hand-made technologies. Arts and crafts understood as applied arts is one of the industries included in the creative industry. There are more than 60 occupations in the list of craft occupations that are considered to be related to arts. Many of them are currently among the so-called disappearing professions. The cooperation of KGW organisations with crafts creates an opportunity not only to maintain traditional production methods and ways of production, but also to modify them in a creative way. Against this background, tradition is not only maintained, but can also be a source of inspiration. This corresponds with the increasingly visible ecological trends, also in design, and a sort of return to nature, also understood as a reference to the past in terms of way of life.

These measures are also part of development policies addressing rural areas, e.g. they favour multifunctional development of rural areas by means of:

- endogenous development potential
- sustainable development
- community-led local development
- supporting public services to develop cultural activities, strengthen the sense of local identity and build civil society.

The social effects of cooperation between crafts and KGWs will result in stimulation of entrepreneurship (especially female entrepreneurship) in rural areas, which will then contribute to rural development. These effects support the creation of new forms of small and medium entrepreneurship corresponding to social economy, which are defined as an element of creative economy. This will trigger the process of creating new jobs and may constitute an important mode of support for vocational education, increasing the chance for the local youth to smoothly enter the labour market. The generation of local human and social capi-

tal resources also cannot be overestimated. By mobilising and integrating key actors in the area, it will contribute to better management of local resources.

An initiative that is particularly beneficial to the local economy is the dissemination of the model of continuous education carried out within crafts organisations. These activities can effectively support lifelong learning by improving knowledge, competences, skills and qualifications, including for people with special educational needs. They promote social inclusion and integration by counteracting socio-economic exclusion through supporting vocational development of persons and families excluded or threatened by poverty and social exclusion. The opportunity to acquire new skills and qualifications confirmed by journeyman and master craftsman exams, also in adult life, supports the process of professional diversification of rural inhabitants and creates the possibility of self-development and conditions for the development of female entrepreneurship. The individualistic and self-realisation tendencies observed in KGW activities allow us to assume that this potential will grow and craft may become one of the ways to fulfil new ambitions of the rural inhabitants.

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