

## **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF RURAL FEMALE LEADERS INVOLVED IN THE WORK OF LOCAL ACTION GROUPS**

Katarzyna Zajda

University of Lodz

**Abstract.** The subject of the article is political participation of rural female leaders involved in the work of local action groups. Previous analyses (disregarding the sex category) proved that the members of those organisations are politically active, but did not show whether women involved in their work were active (and if so, to what extent) – especially in the context of the low level of political participation of women living in villages. The aim was to provide the answer to the question whether the political activity of female members of local action groups can influence the form of local political relations. The article presents the results of sociological research involving a direct survey in Wielkopolskie and Podkarpackie voivodeships carried out in 2012 on the sample of 125 female members of local action groups. The majority of them displayed an average level of political participation. What distinguished the respondents against the background of women living in the country was their critical attitude to the local authorities. Many of them declared the will to stand for the next self-governmental election, among others to change the commune management.

**Key words:** rural women, rural female leaders, political participation, local action groups from Wielkopolskie and Podkarpackie voivodeships

## **INTRODUCTION**

Dynamic transformations of local communities occur among others thanks to formal and informal activity of their leaders [Burns 1978, Hambleton and Bullock 1996, Sashkin and Sashkin 2003, Swianiewicz and Klimska 2003, Między liderem... 2010]. That

group includes persons who are involved in self-governmental structures but also those who are members of local non-governmental organizations or even thriving entrepreneurs.

One of the planes of their cooperation is local action groups (further referred to as LAGs), meaning non-governmental organisations (foundations, associations or combinations of both) formed as part of the implementation of the LEADER approach in Poland [Furmankiewicz 2006, Hanke 2006, Futymski and Kamiński 2008, Halamska 2009, Furmankiewicz and Królikowska 2010, Halamska et al. 2010, Knieć 2010, Zajda 2011, Między interwencją... 2012]. Taking into account the fact that the groups comprise representatives of three sectors (the public, social and economic ones<sup>1</sup>), their importance for the formation of governance policy is discussed [Wódz and Wódz 2007, Izdebski 2010] so as to look for the answer to the question whether they really create special opportunities of participation in decisions concerning local development for persons and entities not connected with power structures.

Previous research proves that the structures have been dominated by local authorities (phenomenon of municipalization of local action groups). The high level of their professionalization and economization limits the opportunity of active participation of individuals who are not part of the local establishment. The management and decision-making bodies of local action groups have been fossilized (the same persons have been serving in them since the Pilot Programme LEADER+, though in various configurations, mainly due to holding some positions in local self-governments or having strong connections with their representatives). As a result, the organisations are dependent on formal and informal influences of local authorities, preventing the representatives of other sectors from actual governance in managing local resources [Halamska 2011, Zajda 2011, Furmankiewicz 2013, Psyk-Piotrowska et al. 2013].

Since the members of those organisations are rural commune heads or town mayors and councillors on the one hand, and social leaders and representatives of business elites on the other hand, their importance for shaping local authority image is analysed by researchers. A question is posed about their real role in defining political relationships, creating and promoting leaders who might take up some functions in the local authority structures in the future.

Previous analyses point out that the participation in local action groups – organisations which can spend millions on the development of villages – is connected with obtaining many resources useful in political struggle both regarding social capital (new, very complex networks of relationships created among others by social opinion leaders) and human capital (extra competencies and skills facilitating self-promotion) [Knieć 2007, Furmankiewicz et al. 2010, Furmankiewicz 2013, p. 82]. Authorities well realize what role local action groups may play in creating their image. Their purpose is often to dominate those structures informally, also in order to prevent the emergence of new political leaders. As Furmankiewicz [2013, p. 82] emphasizes, “The authorities of LAGs may be treated by local politicians as a threat, able to create new elites which will constitute competition e.g. for rural commune heads in the next local election”.

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<sup>1</sup> The public sector is represented by (among others): the offices of municipalities, schools, libraries. The third sector is represented by: non-governmental organizations, the rural housewives associations, volunteer fire brigades. The economic sector is represented by entrepreneurs and farmers.

The authors of studies concerning the importance of local action groups for shaping the governance policy and the local authority image focus on the relationships of public sector representatives with social and economic sectors, disregarding, however, the issues of differences in political participation between males and females working for them<sup>2</sup>. Suffice it to say that women are interested in politics to a lesser degree than men. Only 8% of women follow political events with great interest (as compared with 16% of men), and 29% of them describe their interest in that area of public life as negligible [Cybulska 2013, p. 1]. Women talk about politics less often than men (39% of all women do not talk about it at all) [Cybulska 2013, p. 4], display a lower level of election participation and have a bigger problem with specifying their own political views in the left/right category [Cybulska 2013, p. 9-10]. Women residing in villages have even poorer results in this respect than those living in towns. 5% of women residing in villages and 14% of those living in towns respectively display some interest in politics [Hipsz 2013, p. 5], and as many as 57% of rural women declare little or no interest in that area of public life<sup>3</sup> [Cybulska 2013, p. 2].

Political participation of women has been at a low level for years<sup>4</sup> [Walczak-Duraj 2008]. There are many causes of this situation. They include the still popular (especially in the country) definition of the woman's role identified first of all with providing care and child upbringing, not with professional activity, not to mention political activity – a field stereotypically ascribed to men. In Poland, the new gender contract is just forming [Kobiety w Polsce... 2002]. As Michalska [2013, p. 127-128] emphasizes, “the present activity of rural women in Poland is the product of struggle between the two orders: the old one, which required very big involvement in the private sphere and burdened women with family and domestic duties, and the new one, providing new opportunities and formulating different expectations of women”. True, Poles support the demand of greater activity of women in public life (a considerable number – 46% – would welcome an increase of the number of women at managerial positions in political parties, and 32% support the introduction of election list parities [Omyła-Rudzka 2013, p. 1-3]), but they do not translate their declarations into election behaviours. For example, although the participation of women in local authorities is on the increase (in 1998, there were just over 15% of women in self-government councils, whereas in 2010, females

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noticing that the members of the decision-making bodies of the local action groups in at least 40% should be women [Oś IV PROW... 2009, p. 10].

<sup>3</sup> Commonly, females' lower activity in public life is ascribed to the encumbrance with household chores and the fact that the political sphere is dominated by men. Further reasons are the lack of confidence in their own strengths and possibilities and lower (in comparison to men) interest in public life and pursuing professional careers [Omyła-Rudzka 2013, p. 3-4].

<sup>4</sup> A study by Walczak-Duraj [2008, p. 135-137] (carried out on a representative sample of female village residents in 2008) shows that nearly 83% of rural women did not belong to any political or social organization (and 20 kinds of such activities were taken into consideration, including e.g. farmers' wives' associations, parents' associations, parents' committees, self-help organizations or parish associations). Only one out of fifteen respondents declared high or very high interest in politics, expressed in carefully following the course of most political events. One third were following only the most important of them. About 30% of rural women declared minimum interest in politics, and 28% were not interested in it at all [Walczak-Duraj 2008, p. 141]. When asked about potential areas of socio-political involvement, 5.2% of females indicated work in the communal self-government [Walczak-Duraj 2008, p. 154-158].

constituted one fourth of all the elected councillors), their participation is still lower than 30%, regarded as the value which would ensure real impact on the decisions taken at that level [Niżyńska 2011, p. 3, 19].

## METHODOLOGY

The subject of the article is political participation of females involved in the work of local action groups. The activity level of female members of those groups may affect the form of local power relations. The article concentrates on women engaged in the work of groups operating within Wielkopolskie and Podkarpacie voivodeships, Both of the regions are characterised by highest socio-political activity of rural women [Walczak-Duraj 2008, p. 139]. Hence, it may be supposed that political participation will be at least at a medium level, especially that the women who participated in the study did not only formally belong to local action groups but participated in their activity one way or another. The respondents were members of organisations such as: Gościnną Wielkopolska Local Action Group, Ostrzeszów Local Action Group, KOLD Association Local Action Group, Światowid Association, Czarnków-Trzcianka Local Action Group Association with Magura Subregion, Partnership for Nisko Land, Lasovia, CK Podkarpacie, PROWENT, The Land of the San, The Valley of the Strug, Wisłok Catchment Area, and Czarnorzecze-Strzyżów LAG<sup>5</sup>.

Quoting Verba et al. [1995, p. 38], women's political participation was defined as: "activity whose intention or effect is exerting direct influence on political institutions by the development or implementation of public policy or indirect influence by the selection of people who create the policy". The following things were analysed: the level of interest of female members of local action groups in politics, participation in preparing election campaigns or in work for a candidate, a party or an election committee, their election behaviours (participation in self-government election, considering standing for the election, including the position of a rural commune head or town mayor), the will to make changes in the way of local authorities functioning, potential impact on the decisions taken by these authorities and submitting various proposals, requests or demands to them [Starosta and Frykowski 2008, p. 237-238].

The direct survey method was applied in the study. The survey questionnaires (containing closed and open questions) were distributed among the female members of general meetings of those organisations and/or meetings of management boards or councils. They were filled in by 125 respondents<sup>6</sup>. Representatives of the social sector were the biggest group (56.8% of the total number). The sample included 26.4% representatives of the public sector and 9.6% of the economic one<sup>7</sup>. Slightly more than a half (54.8%) of the respondents were serving certain functions in their local action groups: 1) a member of the management board (27.4% of the total number), 2) a member of the council,

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<sup>5</sup> The local action groups which had implemented the Pilot Programme LEADER+ were the subject of the study.

<sup>6</sup> For different reasons, it was impossible to create a random sample of respondents. Therefore, the presented results refer to the leaders of the studied organizations, and the way of selecting the sample does not allow for drawing any statistical conclusions.

<sup>7</sup> The affiliation to one of 3 sectors of 9 respondents was impossible to determine.

or the decision-making body (25%), and 3) a member of the audit committee (approx. 2.4%). Women who had higher education<sup>8</sup> (59.7%) and were professionally active (75.8%) dominated in the respondent group. There were no persons aged 18-24 in the studied sample; 11.5% of the respondents were between 25 and 34 years old and 22.1% were between 35 and 44. 33.6% of all the respondents were women aged 45-54, 27.4% were between 55-64 and 5.3% respondents were older than 65.

Some of the empirical material collected (in the first half of 2012) as part of the research connected with the execution of the project "The Structure and Determinants of Local Action Groups' Social Capital" (grant NCN no. 6996/B/H03/2011/40) was also used in this study.

## RESULTS

The analysis of the material confirmed the assumption that women who are socially and politically active dominate in LAGs.

Almost every third respondent (32%) had been a councillor, rural commune head, town mayor or village leader before joining the local action group. The vast majority of the respondents declared some social activity. Some of them displayed a few kinds of social activity. More than a half were involved privately in various initiatives for the benefit of commune residents, approx. 46% belonged to local non-governmental organizations, 37% worked for institutions acting for the benefit of commune residents and thus were involved in their operations (also apart from the professional responsibilities), 14% sponsored different initiatives for the good of commune residents, and 27% informed local institutions of the need to implement some enterprises.

What is interesting, the persons who had served public functions before joining LAGs currently represent in those organisations (to a similar extent) the public (30.4%), economic (33.3%) and social (31.6%) sector. This does not necessarily prove the real interest of the representatives of local NGOs and entrepreneurs in participation in local authorities<sup>9</sup>. The above results can well be the premise for a conclusion of quite a high level of municipalization of the analysed local action groups, one of whose aspects is concealing actual representatives of local authorities under the aegis of the social or economic sector.

The research results show that most of the women working in LAGs are interested in politics. 43.2% of all the respondents declared very high or high interest in it<sup>10</sup>, 47.2%, medium<sup>11</sup>, and 5.8% admitted that they did not pay much attention even to the crucial political events (which was interpreted as little interest in politics), while 0.8% declared

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<sup>8</sup> 8% of the respondents had primary or vocational education, 24.5%, secondary or incomplete secondary, and 8.8% represented post-secondary or incomplete university education.

<sup>9</sup> A village leader is an executive body of an auxiliary communal unit (*one-village – solectwo*) elected by the village meeting. He or she maintains formal and informal contacts with rural commune heads, town mayors and communal councillors, so village residents often include them in the group of people connected with the local authorities.

<sup>10</sup> 9.6% said that they were following almost everything that occurred in politics, and 33.6%, that they were quite carefully following it.

<sup>11</sup> Those persons admitted that they only followed the main political events.

that they were not interested at all in what was going on in that field of public life. The women who were not interested in politics at all only represented the economic sector<sup>12</sup>. Asked about the reasons for their attitude, the persons not interested in politics or interested in it to a little extent indicated the lack of trust in politicians: "I can't trust politicians or understand most of them"; they commented negatively on their behaviour: "I am fed up with their ridiculing Poland" and their personal qualities: "Politicians are incompetent, ill-mannered and unintelligent".

LAG female members manifested high activity in preparing election campaigns or work for a candidate, a party or an election committee. Nearly half (48%) of the respondents participated in them. In the group of women who had served as rural commune heads (or town mayors) before, the percentage was 85.2%. So their participation in such activities proved to be significant. Not only representatives of the public sector were involved in it. Women from the social sector and 1/3 of business women<sup>13</sup> were also active in that respect (Table 1).

Table 1. Dependence between the sectors represented by the respondents and their taking up activities for the benefit of candidates, parties or election committees

Tabela 1. Zależność między sektorem reprezentowanym przez badane a podejmowaniem przez nie działań na rzecz kandydatów lub partii, komitetu wyborczego

Respondent's sector Sektor reprezentowany przez respondentkę	Percentage of the respondents who took or did not take up actions for the benefit of candidates, parties or election committees, N = 125 Odsetek badanych podejmujących lub nie podejmujących działania na rzecz kandydatów lub partii, komitetu wyborczego, N = 125	
	yes tak	no nie
Public – Publiczny	54.5	45.5
Economic – Gospodarczy	33.3	66.7
Social – Społeczny	48.6	51.4

Source: own study.  
Źródło: opracowanie własne.

<sup>12</sup> Women's interest in politics is affected by their education, socio-economic status and age. Women with higher education (14%), wealthier, regarding their financial condition as good (10%) and older (every tenth women over 55 years of age) are interested in politics [Cybulska 2013, p. 1]. The author's own study did not show any correlation between the respondents' education and their level of interest in politics. 23.1% of persons aged 25-34 displayed very high or high level of interest in that area of public life, compared to 40% of persons aged 35-44, 43.2% of persons aged 45-54, 46.5% of persons aged 55-64 and 100% of the oldest ones (over 65 years old).

<sup>13</sup> The lowest activity was typical of the youngest respondents, i.e. those aged 25-34 (23.1% of them as compared to 44% of women aged 35-44, 62.2% of those aged 45-54, 51.6% of those aged 55-64 and 75% of women aged 65 or older). No persons with education lower than incomplete secondary participated in preparing election campaigns or work for a candidate, party or election committee.

The vast majority of the respondents declared participation in the latest self-governmental election<sup>14</sup> (91.1%), and 36.3% of all the respondents had been considering standing for local elections in the past (including 11.5% who had thought of becoming a rural commune head or town mayor). For a comparison, in 2010, 14% of all the persons applying for the position of a communal executive body were women [Niżyńska 2011, p. 14]. Representatives of the public, economic and social sector<sup>15</sup> were interested in that function to a similar extent (33.4%, 33.3% and 39.4% interested, respectively).

When asked about their motivation, the respondents predominantly pointed out: a) the will to influence the development of their commune (thus declaring a high level of social subjectivity): "I wanted to have an impact of the local reality", "I know that serving in the self-government, I have a real impact on its development", b) the will to help commune residents: "I stood for the election to improve the quality of life of the community, for their benefit." The respondents also (although much less frequently) expressed the conviction that they might be useful in managing the commune due to the knowledge they had: "I know the work of self-government and I know what must be changed to ensure the region's development", "I have my own vision of local development".

Such expressions show at least declared involvement of female members of LAGs in the problems of the communes and their residents.

A significant number of them thought that changes in the way of functioning of the present authorities were necessary. Approximately 2/5 of the respondents (41.4%) declared that they would do such changes<sup>16</sup>. Such declarations were more often made by representatives of the public sector (48.5%) than the social (40.8%) and economic (41.7%) ones, and these mostly included the women who did not trust the representatives of local authorities<sup>17</sup> (that referred to about 68% of the women who indicated the need of changes). They can see: a) that the authorities need to open up to a dialogue with commune residents: "Greater involvement is necessary to ensure the information flow, honesty and openness in the relationships between residents and the legislative or executive bodies, as well as greater involvement in establishing better relationships between the authorities, greater communicativeness", b) the necessity of skilful cooperation with different interest groups and local leaders: "Opportunities for social and economic activity should be created", "Active people should be promoted, not isolated",

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<sup>14</sup> The percentage of respondents who declared their participation in president and parliamentary elections was lower but still very high (78.2% and 74.2% of the total number, respectively).

<sup>15</sup> Such declarations were least frequently made by women aged 25-34 (7.7%), and most frequently by those aged 45-54 (54.1%) and over 65 (50%). Standing for elections was considered by persons with at least secondary education. Farmers were more active in that regard than women working in other areas (54.5% compared to 35.4%).

<sup>16</sup> It is worth mentioning that as many as 19.3% of the women are of the opinion that councillors only represent the interests of their political parties, and 15.9%, that they only care about themselves and their families (37.5% of the respondents think the councillors represent the interests of the residents of the commune, while 27.3% see that the interests of councillors' electors are represented).

<sup>17</sup> The participants' ages did not differentiate their declarations in that respect. However, persons with secondary or higher education more often declared they would change something in the functioning of the local authorities. This opinion was slightly more often expressed by farmers than by non-farmers (54.5% compared to 54.5%).

and c) the necessity to introduce organizational changes: "I would give residents easier access to public information, manage the communal budget in a way clear for the residents, and establish principles of equal access to public infrastructure". None of the respondents criticized the representatives of local authorities personally. The reservations were first of all substantive in character and referred to the management of the commune.

Just over 1/4 of the respondents (26.8%) thought that they had a big or very big influence on the decisions taken by local authorities, whereas just over a half (55.8%) described the level of influence as average, and 17.4%, as small. The respondents had already used their possibilities in that regard before. Almost seven out ten (68.2%) of them submitted some proposals, requests or demands to representatives of local authorities personally or together with other people. The respondents were convinced that they were able to really affect the form of local politics, solve the problems of their environment, assuming that the most effective mechanism to reduce or solve local problems is cooperation between local authorities and the residents. Answering the question of who should solve the problems of the commune (the question with the possible answers), 29.3% of the total sample pointed out that it should be residents assisted with local authorities, 43.1% that local authorities assisted by the residents, and 19.5%, that "local authorities assisted by the residents and persons such as you". Only 6.5% of the respondents thought that residents should solve their problems themselves, and only 1.6%, that "only local authorities, because they have been appointed for this purpose".

The analyses presented above served to create an index of local political participation. It was made up of 6 variables, i.e.: 1) the respondents' participation in preparing election campaigns or work for a candidate, a party or an election committee, 2) participation in self-governmental elections, 3) considering standing for self-governmental elections, 4) considering taking up the position of a rural commune head or town mayor, 5) declaration of whether the respondent would change anything in the functioning of local authorities (yes/no), 6) declaration whether the respondent had submitted any requests, proposals or demands to local authorities (variable transformed to the dichotomous form).

In view of the fact that all the variables were dichotomous (assigned values: 1-if the answer was "Yes", and 2 – if the answer was "No") the span of the resultant index was 6-12; values 6 and 7 were regarded as typical of a high level of political participation, values from 8 to 10 as typical of its medium level, and 11 and 12, of a low level. 35.8% of all the respondents displayed a high level of political participation, 45.7%, a medium one, and 18.5%, a low level.

On the basis of the conducted research, three interesting dependencies were found. First, the low level of political participation described this way was most often characteristic of representatives of the economic sector. Their group was strongly differentiated. Even half of them represented the highest level of the analysed variable, and one fourth, the lowest level (Table 2).

This situation may be explained with reference to the phenomenon of municipalization of local action groups. One of its versions is concealing actual representatives of local authorities under the aegis of the social or economic sector. Maybe the group of economic sector representatives really included representatives of the public sector, having a high level of political participation (which considerably raised the result of the whole sector).

Table 2. Dependence between the sectors represented by the respondents and their political participation levels

Tabela 2. Zależność między sektorem reprezentowanym przez badane a charakteryzującym je poziomem partycypacji politycznej

Sector representation Reprezentowanie sektora	Level of political participation, N = 125 Poziom partycypacji politycznej, N = 125		
	high wysoki	medium średni	low niski
Public – Publicznego	46.2	46.2	7.7
Economic – Gospodarczego	50.0	25.0	25.0
Social – Społecznego	31.7	51.2	17.1

Source: own study.  
Źródło: opracowanie własne.

Table 3. Dependence between the respondents serving public functions in the past and their level of political participation

Tabela 3. Zależność między sprawowaniem przez badane w przeszłości funkcji publicznej a charakteryzującym je poziomem partycypacji politycznej

Serving a public function in the past Sprawowanie w przeszłości funkcji publicznej	Level of political participation, N = 125 Poziom partycypacji politycznej, N = 125		
	high wysoki	medium średni	low niski
yes – tak	73.3	20.0	6.7
no – nie	32.4	56.8	10.8

Source: own study.  
Źródło: opracowanie własne.

Table 4. Dependence between the respondents' trust in local authorities and their level of political participation

Tabela 4. Zależność między zaufaniem respondentek do władz lokalnych a ich poziomem partycypacji politycznej

Trust in local authorities of the commune Zaufanie do władz lokalnych gminy	Level of political participation, N = 125 Poziom partycypacji politycznej, N = 125		
	high wysoki	medium średni	low niski
Yes – Tak	35.7	46.4	17.9
No – Nie	61.1	27.8	11.1

Source: own study.  
Źródło: opracowanie własne.

Second, a dependence was observed between the women's past experiences with serving public functions and the level of their political participation. Those who had the experience as councillors, rural commune heads, town mayors or village leaders noticeably more often had a high participation level. Those who did not have such experiences significantly more often achieved a medium level of it (Table 3).

Third, in the light of the obtained factors, high level of political participation was more often displayed by the respondents who declared the lack of trust in local authorities (Table 4). That critical attitude should be treated as a catalyst for political behaviours of women who wanted to change the status quo (i.e. participating in the preparation of an election campaign of a rival, standing for elections themselves or submitting different requests and demands to the authorities in order to improve their operation).

## SUMMARY

Many researchers study the problem of the impact of local action groups on transformations in rural areas. Some of them use in their analyses the concept of local governance, concentrating on the importance of those organisations for the formation of the relationships between the representatives of the public, economic and social sectors which allow for common decisions concerning local development or facilitate taking such decisions. Another (but related) subject of the research is the attitude of local authorities taking part in the work of those structures to the leaders of social organisations and entrepreneurs who might gain a significant influence on the functioning of self-government, especially standing for the next election. Previous analyses (disregarding the sex category) proved that the members of local action groups are politically active, but did not show whether women involved in their work were active (and if so, to what extent) – especially in the context of the low level of political participation of women living in the country.

The article was an attempt to describe local action groups from Wielkopolskie and Podkarpackie voivodeships regarding the political participation of their female members. The results of the analysis were to provide the answer to the question whether the level of social and political activity of women enables them to have real impact of the structure of local power relationships.

It proved that most of them had a medium level of political participation, although it is noteworthy that the percentage of women with a high level of participation was relatively high (35.8%). The female members of local action groups definitely distinguished from the background of all the female village residents. The vast majority of them were interested in politics; only 6.6% declared little or no interest in it. Every third respondent had already served a public function before joining the local action group, nearly half had participated in an election campaign or work for a candidate, a party or an election committee, and about 36% had intended to stand for a local election. Almost one third of the respondents declared that they had a big or very big influence on the decisions taken by local authorities, and two fifths of them had some reservations regarding the functioning of local authorities.

The above-mentioned information allows to advance a thesis that women from local action groups have a potential which they can use to change the form of the local authorities, and this is what they want to achieve, among others standing for the next self-

-government election. The respondents' declarations concerning formal sector affiliation show that especially public institution and non-governmental organization leaders manifest a level of political participation which will allow them to actively participate in local politics. Still, when interpreting the obtained results, we must remember about the phenomenon of municipalization of local action groups, very hard to notice (especially in standardized studies). The awareness of the phenomenon calls for careful evaluation of the political participation of local social activists, particularly the women who run their own businesses.

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## **PARTYCYPACJA POLITYCZNA LIDEREK WIEJSKICH ZAANGAŻOWANYCH W PRACIE LOKALNYCH GRUP DZIAŁANIA**

**Streszczenie.** Przedmiotem rozważań w niniejszym artykule jest partycypacja polityczna liderek wiejskich zaangażowanych w prace lokalnych grup działania. Dotychczasowe analizy (nie uwzględniające kategorii płci) dowodziły, iż członkowie tych organizacji są aktywni politycznie, jednak nie wskazywały, czy aktywne (i w jakim stopniu) są kobiety zaangażowane w ich prace – zwłaszcza w kontekście niskiego poziomu partycypacji politycznej kobiet zamieszkujących wieś. Dążono do udzielenia odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy aktywność polityczna członkiń lokalnych grup działania może wpłynąć na kształt lokalnych stosunków politycznych. Zaprezentowano wyniki badań socjologicznych przeprowadzonych za pomocą ankiety rozdawanej w województwie wielkopolskim i podkarpackim w 2012 roku na próbie 125 członkiń lokalnych grup działania. Większość z nich charakteryzowała się średnim poziomem partycypacji politycznej. Respondentki wyróżniały się na tle kobiet zamieszkujących wieś swoją krytyczną postawą wobec lokalnych władz. Wiele z nich deklarowało chęć kandydowania w następnych wyborach samorządowych, chcąc m.in. dokonywać zmian w zarządzaniu gminą.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kobiety wiejskie, liderki wiejskie, partycypacja polityczna, wielkopolskie i podkarpackie lokalne grupy działania

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