

## DETERMINANTS OF RURAL WOMEN'S ACTIVITY IN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Jacek PUCHAŁA

University of Agriculture in Krakow; jacek.puchala@urk.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-7671-411X

**Purpose:** The paper analyses factors motivating women to become involved in the activities of Rural Homemakers' Clubs (RHCs) (*Kola Gospodyń Wiejskich*). The article points to drivers responsible for the involvement of respondents in the activities of the Rural Homemakers' Clubs. It presents activities performed by the surveyed RHCs. The study also presents information about areas in which the Rural Homemakers' Clubs are helpful to their members as well as reasons why some women do not participate in their activities. A ranking of reasons of non-participation in the activities of the organizations such as the RHC was developed. The paper also discusses activities which would be the most useful within the area where the surveyed RHCs function.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The survey was carried out among the Rural Homemakers' Clubs (KGW) being women's organizations with very few exceptions. In general there are approximately 10,000 entities of that kind operating in Poland. They are registered with the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture (*Agencja Restrukturyzacji i Modernizacji Rolnictwa*) or an agricultural club (*kółko rolnicze*) as associations. There are also organizations that have not been formalized or registered. The purpose of their operations is to cultivate tradition, foster personal development of their members and maintain local recipes. A research sample consisted of 136 RHCs.

Computer aided interview surveys were conducted; surveys were sent by e-mail. A research tool included open-ended and closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions included answers such as "I definitely disagree" and "I rather disagree" as well as "I rather agree" and "I definitely agree". Crosstabs were prepared for the purpose of developing diagrams.

The following research hypotheses were adopted:

1. leadership in the RHCs should take the form of coaching leadership because personal development was the major motivating factor behind women's involvement in those organizations.
2. In rural areas the factors that push women to participate in the RHCs were: "the need to act", "integration with others" and "interactions with people".
3. Willingness to help others is a factor characteristic of unmarried rather than married people.
4. The need to "go out" is a stronger factor motivating people aged 31-60 compared to other age groups.
5. To the RHC members such membership proves helpful mostly when it comes to social advancement.
6. Failure to accept such activity by life partners is the most important disincentive for people to get involved in the activities in the RHCs.

**Findings:** People are motivated to become involved in the activities of RHCs partly by selfish motives (access to fairs thanks to the RHCs – 31.6% of respondents, facilitated handicraft sale thanks to the RHCs - almost 35% of respondents, willingness to help oneself – nearly 53% of respondents, personal growth – 74% of respondents). Personal reasons are also altruistic, pro-social (socialization-related), e.g. a desire to help others – nearly 80% of respondents, a desire to pass on one's knowledge – nearly 57% of respondents. The need to team up and work with others is a factor that motivates a similar number of respondents as willingness to network (integrate) – 84.6% and 83.1% of respondents, respectively.

**Research limitations/implications:** The members of the Rural Homemakers' Clubs are often seniors; frequently they are not Internet users. The respondents' age structure is dominated by the group aged 31 - 50 (32.4% and 41.9% of respondents, respectively). The respondents aged 61+ accounted for approx. 7.5% the research sample. Hence, the research results appear characteristic rather for younger people. In order to obtain answers from elderly members of the RHCs, the survey should have been sent by regular mail.

**Originality/value:** The article is a new look at the aspect under study and is part of a larger study, the results of which will be presented in subsequent articles.

**Keywords:** organization networking, *Koło Gospodyń Wiejskich* (Rural Homemakers' Club), motivating factors, development of rural areas, organization networking.

**Category of the paper:** research paper.

## 1. Introduction

Personal development and improvement of women's social and professional situation are important factors behind their involvement in organizations. The Rural Homemakers' Club is a voluntary, independent, social and professional organization of women that operates in rural areas. Important factors behind the establishment of women's organizations are political factors, actually the influence of politically active persons on women. The Rural Homemakers' Club in Słobódka Bołszowiecka, which was the first such club in the Polish territory, was established in 1877 in Janisławice by a socialist activist, Filipina Płaskowicka. Therefore, the factors related to the transfer of innovations are crucial. In that case Filipina Płaskowicka acted as such factor, although she was not the one who came up with the model of the Club as an organization because a similar organization called the Association of Homemakers (*Towarzystwo Gospodyń*) operated since 1866 in Piaseczno in the Gdańsk Pomerania.

Women's associations that were established were ancillary to agricultural clubs. Such agricultural clubs were voluntary, social and economic organizations associating farmers and their purpose was to boost and improve agricultural production. Thanks to access to state-of-the-art knowledge in the area of hygiene, health and nutrition, members of female organizations were to support the development of rural communities. In other words, the first women's organizations in rural areas were established partly due to the necessity of convincing wives to let their husbands out of the house to take part in training sessions. Wives discouraged their husbands from participating in agricultural associations as they believed that they spent time there chatting and drinking alcohol. In 1866 Julian Kraziewicz established the

“Association of Homemakers” (*Towarzystwo Gospodyń*) to persuade women that their suspicions towards their husbands were wrong, to present the purpose of the associations and teach women useful homemaking skills.

At present the Rural Homemakers' Clubs mostly cherish local traditions, draw connections to roots, inspire to take action and contribute to building bridges between generations in local communities. They successfully complete local projects, take civic initiatives and perform tasks provided for in the Sołectwo Fund. The Rural Homemakers' Clubs get involved in cultural events organized in gminas (communes), poviats and capitals of voivodeships, including, among other things, harvest festivals or exhibitions of handicrafts. The RHCs cherish local customs, cultivate culture and promote culinary traditions. The Clubs cultivate the traditions of family and neighborly life and keep forgotten local traditions alive. They create amazing handicrafts keeping cultural heritage for future generations. Together with village heads they organize various ceremonies such as harvest festivals, games for children, youth and adults that bring together entire generations. The activities of the RHCs are not just limited to cooking and singing but also include staging theatre performances, doing needlework, making decorations, cultivating local traditions, celebrating religious and other holidays and recovering customs. The Rural Homemakers' Clubs make life in the country more attractive. Despite many socio-cultural changes and ongoing march towards modernity the Rural Homemakers' Clubs have survived, remain faithful to traditions and bravely implement their goals.

Motivation is very important to the organization and refers to forces that determine directions, intensity and duration of human activities. Motivating people to act is not easy, let alone become engaged in social work, hence the idea to research the motivation of women who get involved the activities of the Rural Homemakers' Clubs'. There are numerous theories related to motivation. Maslov's Hierarchy of needs theory (Maslov, 1954; McClelland, 1987) points to the hierarchy of needs from physiological ones to self-fulfillment being the motivating factors. The equity theory or social comparison theory (Adams, 1965) points to a psychological phenomenon of drawing conclusions regarding oneself in terms of comparisons to others (abilities, values, attitudes). According to the expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), motivation depends on two factors: on how strongly we desire something and on the expected likelihood of fulfilling that desire. A goal-setting theory, a theory of motivation (Locke, Latham, 1990) posits that clear, well-defined and measurable goals improve performance much better than those which are unclear. The Job design model (the job characteristics theory) is a model developed by Richard Hackman and Grieg Oldham (Hackman, Oldham, 1976, 1980) that describes the job whose five basic characteristics include: diversity of skills, task idiopathy, task meaning, independence and feedback. The self-determination theory (Deci, Ryan, 1985; Ryan, Deci, 2000) is based on the assumption that the desire to reach a specific goal is a basic source of motivation. The goal is what we intend to achieve within a specific period of time.

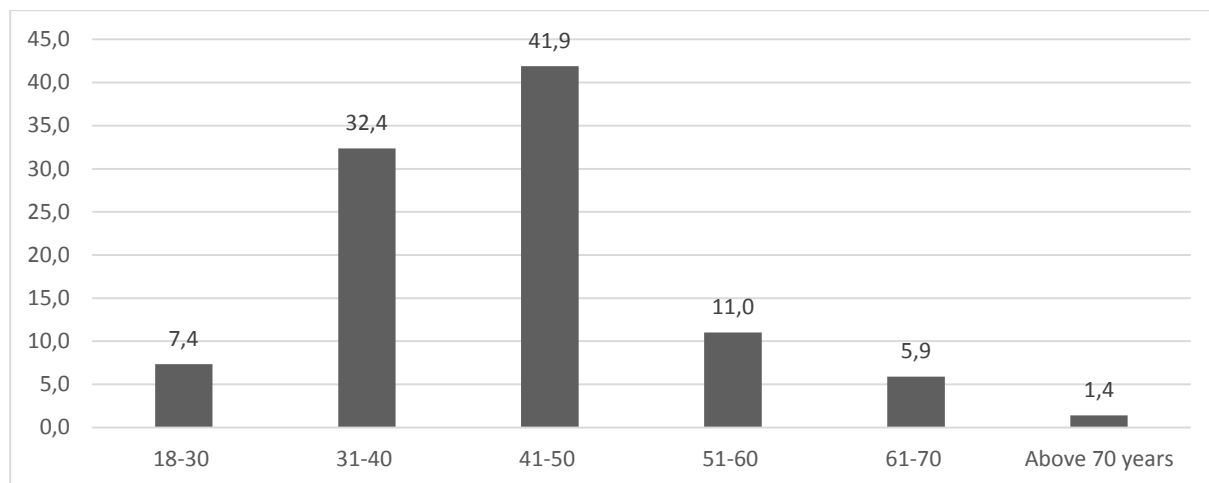
The research into the participation of women in non-governmental organizations discovers several motivating factors, including willingness to make a contribution to the society, acquiring knowledge and skills, networking, increasing career perspectives and building self-esteem. Women are also interested in working for non-governmental organizations because they care about social issues, search for educational experiences, express idealism and appreciate flexibility and independence. The involvement in NGOs may strengthen women's position in economic and social terms, particularly in developing countries where traditional customs frequently make the involvement of women difficult (Panday, 2016). However, challenges such as limited time due to family responsibilities, gender stereotypes, lack of awareness as regards benefits for non-governmental organizations, limited access to information and low self-confidence prevent women's active involvement. Despite those difficulties a growing number of women's NGOs is an indication of growing recognition of women's important role in social growth and their potential to influence politics and the process of solving women's problems.

## **2. Research sample - description**

The majority of the RHCs to which the respondents belonged are registered with the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture (ARMA) (74% of the respondents). The RHCs registered as associations in the National Court Register accounted for 3% and those registered with the Agricultural Club only 1% of the sample. Only 5% of the surveyed RHCs were registered in several registers and only 2% of the respondents specified that their RHC was not registered in any register. 15% of the respondents were unable or did not want to specify the RHC's legal form.

Mostly women are the members of the Rural Homemakers' Clubs but the surveyed sample also included men (approximately 3% - 4 persons). Three fourths of the survey respondents were married. Two thirds of the respondents had higher education (73.5% of the sample), whereas every fifth respondent had secondary education (9.6% graduated from high school and 11.8% were technical secondary school graduates). 4.4% of the respondents had vocational education and 0.7% - primary education.

Regarding the age structure of the respondents, they were mostly people aged 31-50 (32.4% and 41.9% of the respondents). Every tenth respondent was aged 18-30 years old (7.4% of the surveyed RHC members) or 51-60 years old (11% of the surveyed respondents). People aged 61+ accounted for approximately 7.5% of the research sample (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The respondents' age structure (%).

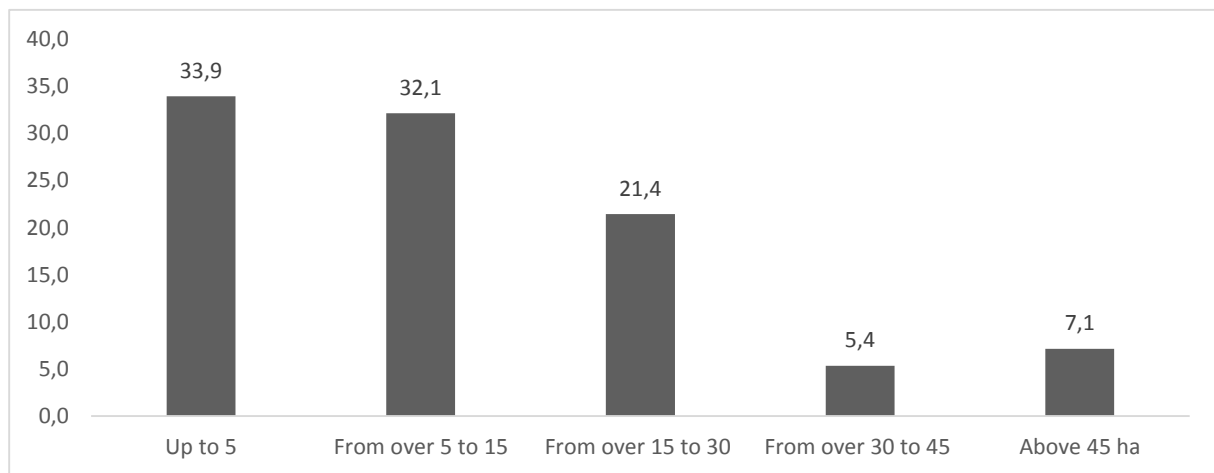
Source: own study based on the interview surveys, N = 126.

Every tenth respondent works on a farm for up to one hour per day (11% of the respondents). Approximately 14% of the respondents spend more than one hour but no more than three hours working on the farm whereas approximately 10% of the respondents work for more than three but no more than five hours. Almost 7.5% of the respondents spend more than five hours working on the farm. In total four out of ten persons devote their time to farm work. The majority of the farms have an area up to 15 ha of utilized agricultural area (66% of the farms – diagram 2). The introduction of agricultural innovations resulted in the decrease of the time women spend working on farms. Women's average farm work time in 1992 per day totaled 6 hours and 30 minutes and in 1996 it was down to 5 hours and 40 minutes, i.e. 50 minutes less over the course of four years. Those calculations result from the subjective assessment made by women surveyed by Ostrowski (1998). The number of farm work hours differs in three different groups of women. The first group consists of persons being in charge of the farm. The second group comprises women helping on farms managed by a man: a husband, a brother or a father. The third group includes women from non-farm families who are housewives and householders.

The research sample mainly included the persons that help on farms run by another person (31.6% of the respondents). The persons running the farm accounted for 15.4% of the respondents. Every fourth respondent came from a non-farm family and was a householder (25.7% of the respondents). Approximately 27% of the respondents stated that they were not closely connected to any of said groups and those were the respondents who, for example, came from a farm family but currently they were not connected to any farm work as, for example, they leased their UAA and changed their career engaging in business activity or non-farm work.

The most frequent non-agricultural profession practiced by the respondents is that related to working in a gmina office (17.6% of the respondents), as a school teacher (9.6% of the respondents) and as sole traders (13.2% of the respondents). Other professions practiced by the respondents included a broad range of specialties, e.g. a food technologist, a forester, a logistic, a kids' animator, a wireman, a social animator, a copywriter, an accountant, an HR manager,

a graphic, a photographer, a postman, a promotion and collaboration specialist, a nurse, uniformed services, a career of the elderly and a product quality controller.



**Figure 2.** The structure of the size of farms of persons working there (%).

Source: own study based on the interview survey, N = 80.

50% of the surveyed RHCs are engaged in gainful activities (54%). Most frequently such gainful activities involve selling regional foods (18%), folk arts, including folk and artistic handicrafts (approx. 15%) or lease (approx. 10%). 35% of the surveyed RHCs perform registered business activities. The Clubs registered with the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture accounted for over 74% of the surveyed organizations.

Four out of ten surveyed organizations (39% of the respondents) do not team up with other institutions. The remaining 83 clubs mostly work together with other Rural Homemakers' Clubs and Volunteer Fire Brigades (37% responses in each category). Every third RHC works together with a local self-government, most frequently at the gmina level (33% of the respondents) and associations (25% of the respondents), and seldom with foundations (16% of the respondents). Co-operation with self-government mostly refers to co-operation with a gmina or powiat cultural center (20% of the respondents). The surveyed organizations frequently work together with elementary schools (18%), very rarely with universities (2.4%). The RHCs network mostly on a local basis, teaming up with parishes (13% respondents), the Local Action Group (5% of respondents). Individual organizations also worked together with the National Agricultural Support Center (*Krajowy Ośrodek Wsparcia Rolnictwa*), the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture, the National Union of Rural Homemakers' Clubs (*Ogólnopolski Związek Kół Gospodyń Wiejskich*), the Powiat Council of Homemakers' Clubs (*Powiatowa Rada Kół Gospodyń*) as well as local companies. An interesting fact is that the RHCs also stated that they work together with the Social Economy Support Center and Business Incubator.

### 3. The author's research findings

The interview survey findings were divided into four subchapters. The chapter entitled "Motivation to act in the context of functions resulting from human needs" analyses research results in the context of six functions connected to human needs which volunteer service may potentially meet. That chapter also includes numerous references to source literature. The Rural Homemakers' Club is useful to the respondents and helps implement many interesting initiatives. Those initiatives are described in the chapter entitled "The activity of Rural Homemakers' Clubs and subsidiarity of those organizations to the respondents". The chapter entitled "Factors affecting the activities of women in non-governmental organizations" features a brief history of women in NGOs. That chapter also includes a ranking of reasons for women's non-participation in the RHCs. SWOT analysis of the surveyed organizations developed on the basis of the research is presented at the end of the paper's fourth subchapter.

#### 3.1. Motivation to act in the context of functions resulting from human needs

Each human being has their own life goals linked to their motivation to act as presented by the self-determination theory. To some a goal will consist in developing sales skills and hence their motivation to become involved in the activities of the RHCs will be to improve skills to sell their handicrafts. Motivation to get involved in the RHC stems from personal reasons. It is partially driven by selfish reasons (access to fairs thanks to the RHCs – 31.6% respondents, facilitated sales thanks to the RHCs - almost 35% respondents, willingness to help oneself – almost 53% respondents, personal development – 74% respondents). **Those responses show that hypothesis no. 1 is true, which is also demonstrated by 74% of respondents who have selected personal development as the reason for getting involved in the RHCs.** Personal reasons are also altruistic, prosocial, e.g. a desire to help others – nearly 80% respondents, a desire to pass on one's knowledge – nearly 57% respondents. The need to team up and work with others is a factor that motivates a similar number of respondents as willingness to network – 84.6% and 83.1% of respondents, respectively (Table 1).

Clary et al. (1998) identified six functions resulting from human needs that voluntary service can potentially serve:

1. the function of expressing humanitarian values (Table 1: Item: 3).
2. the function of seeking other's understanding (Table 1: Item: 4,8).
3. the function of benefits related to professional career (Table 1: Item: 9, 15, 16).
4. the function of obtaining protection from feelings, e.g. the sense of guilt that one is more lucky than other people (Table 1: Item: 3, 10).
5. the function enhancing one's self-esteem (Table 1: Item: 1, 7, 11, 12, 14).
6. the function of a desire to fit in or adjust to a group which is important to a community (Table 1: Item: 2, 5, 6, 9, 13).

Based on the above one may conclude that any and all functions proposed by Clary et al. (1998) are reflected in the reality of the functioning of the RHCs. Two functions are very important to the respondents: the enhancement of one's self-esteem (Table 1: Item: 1, 7, 11, 12, 14) and the function related to a desire to fit in or adjust to the group important to the community (Table 1: Item: 2, 5, 6, 9, 13). People who are orientated towards personal development are motivated to get involved in the RHCs due to opportunities to take part in interesting training sessions and activities in order to learn new knowledge and skills. **The above demonstrates that hypothesis no. 1 is true and that leadership in the RHCs should take the form of a partnership.** As regards persons who want to pass on their knowledge to others, their underlying motivation will be an opportunity to be able to present the results of their work and ways to achieve their goals. Such people should be assigned tasks tailored to their needs resulting from motivation behind their involvement in the activities of the RHCs. Persons to whom access to fairs is a vital reason for their membership in the RHCs will be motivated in proportion to the number of business contacts they have established thanks to the RHCs' participation in fairs.

**Table 1.**

*Reasons for the respondents' participation in the activities of the Rural Homemakers' Clubs*

| Item. | Details   | Number | %    |
|-------|---|--------|------|
| 1     | The need to act   | 115    | 84.6 |
| 2     | Integration with other people   | 113    | 83.1 |
| 3     | Willingness to help others  | 110    | 80.9 |
| 4     | Interaction with other people   | 110    | 80.9 |
| 5     | Willingness to do something with others   | 109    | 80.1 |
| 6     | Meeting with other women  | 104    | 76.5 |
| 7     | Personal development  | 101    | 74.3 |
| 8     | The need to go out  | 84     | 61.8 |
| 9     | Performing a public function facilitates negotiations with representatives of local authorities | 83     | 61.0 |
| 10    | Willingness to pass on one's knowledge  | 78     | 57.4 |
| 11    | Extending life activities   | 77     | 56.6 |
| 12    | Willingness to help oneself   | 73     | 53.7 |
| 13    | Willingness to do something in one's free time  | 64     | 47.1 |
| 14    | Extending life activities   | 56     | 41.2 |
| 15    | Easier handicrafts sales through the RHCs   | 48     | 35.3 |
| 16    | Access to fairs thanks to the RHCs  | 43     | 31.6 |
| 17    | Other reasons of the respondents' involvement in the RHCs                                       | 51     | 37.5 |

Source: own study based on the interview survey, N = 136.

Transformational leadership (Arnold et al., 2007) or coaching leadership as the people managing theory can be useful at the RHCs, particularly in regard to those who want to grow in the organization, showing such persons that they are able to do more than they thought they could based on their own perception of themselves. Such fact motivates them to a greater effort because they will believe that they can really do more.

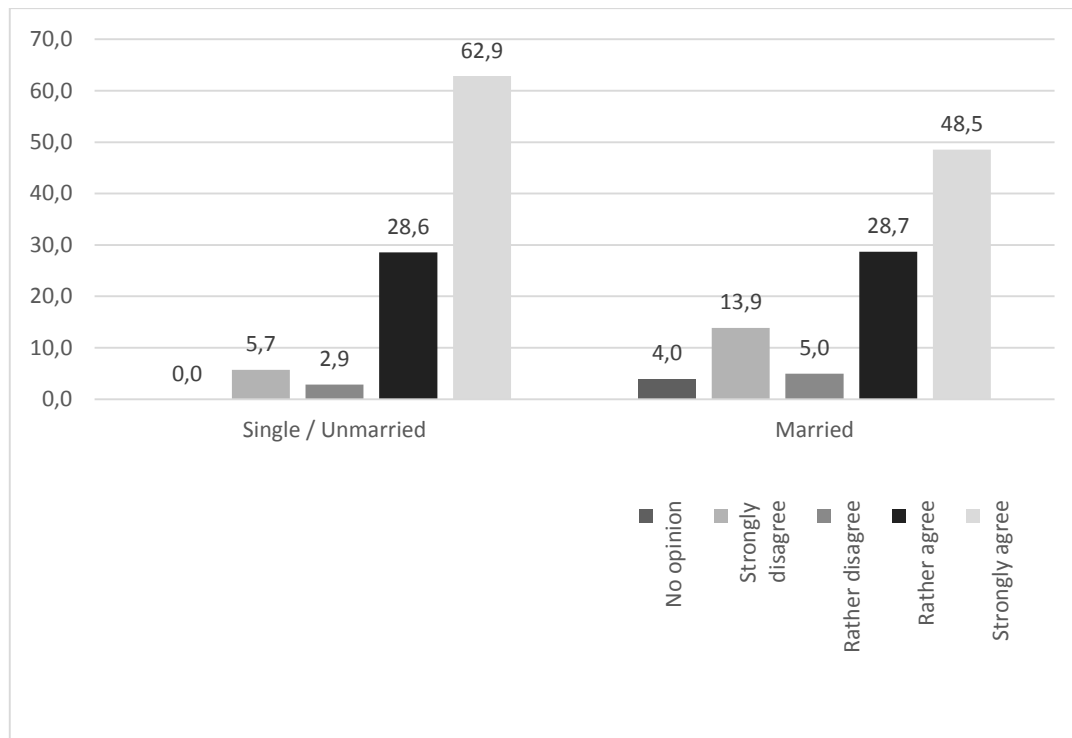
The respondents to whom the "need to act" was a strong motivating factor to join the RHC also specified factors such as: "integration with others", "willingness to do something with others", "interaction with people". **Thus hypothesis no. 2, i.e. in rural areas "integration**



**with others” and “interaction with people” are the motivating factors to participate in the RHCs is confirmed.** The motivating factor “facilitated sale of handicrafts thanks to the RHC” was strongly correlated with “access to fairs thanks to the RHC”. To those respondents who listed “integration with others” as one of their motivating factors, “interaction with people”, “willingness to do something with others” and “the need to act” were equally important factors.

Other reasons of joining the RHC which were not suggested in the survey were provided by 37% of the respondents (51 persons) and included “willingness to get the society to take action instead of complaining”. Sometimes motivation results from a goal being a specific project, for example, one of the respondents wrote that “I wanted to stimulate the place where I live and renovate old buildings which have not been renovated for years”. Based on the survey responses one can see that the respondents would like to contribute to positive changes in their villages and improve the life of younger generations, maintain traditions, support the development of children and youth, share their passions, hobbies and local culture which includes the participation of the RHCs in cooking, nature and artistic workshops (e.g. dance). The respondents emphasized that without the RHCs “nothing was going on” in their villages. Thanks to the fact that the members of the RHCs are motivated to perform social work, local human capital is mobilized, integrated and new elements are not only maintained but also introduced into local culture (“at least since we have the RHC something has been going on in the village”, ”Creating new ideas for workshops, experimenting with new flavors/dishes”). Sometimes the RHCs stimulate the inhabitants of neighborly villages to become active - “there are RHCs in other villages so we can have one, too!”. Other motivating factors to become involved in the activities of the RHC included “promoting one’s region and culture”, “taking care of one’s small homeland, supporting initiatives and the development of one’s village”. Promotion should be particularly important as a motivating factor behind collaboration in the case of those villages that are interested in developing agritourism and rural tourism. The respondents also expressed their motivation to be members of the RHCs in the following way: “I like being with people, I would like to help them, it gives me great joy and satisfaction”, “I like it, social activism is in my DNA”, “I love working with people and for people”. One of the respondents directly wrote that: “there are no leaders whereas the demand for volunteering in my area is high”. Many respondents emphasized motivating power of the purpose of their activities, e.g. “integration, mobilization of our community”.

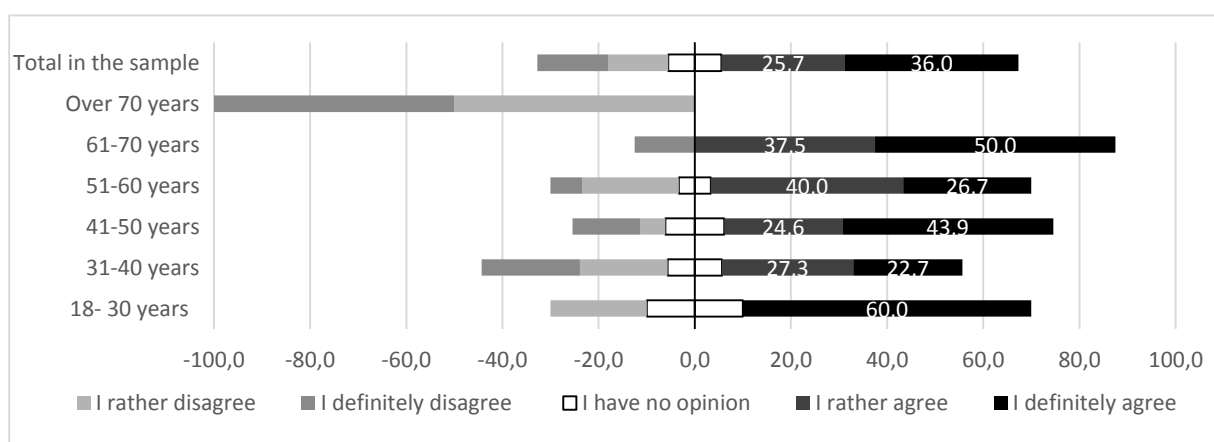
“Willingness to help others” was a motivating factor more frequently specified by unmarried vis-a-vis married people (Figure 3). **The above confirms hypothesis no. 3.**



**Figure 3.** The “willingness to help others” motivating factor by marital status (%).

Source: own study based on the interview survey.

“The need to go out” as a motivating factor to become involved in the RHC is characteristic of the age group 61-70 (Figure 4 – negative values refer to the responses “I definitely disagree” and “I rather disagree” for better visualization of the structure of the responses), where 87.5% of the respondents specified that factor (a sum total of the answers “I rather agree” and “I definitely agree”). As an organization the RHC plays an important role in the rural areas where Catholic Church is frequently the only organization close by. The above is particularly true in the case of seniors to whom mobility can be an issue. “The need to go out” was more frequently specified as a motivating factor by people aged 18-30 compared to the 31- 40 age group. **Therefore, hypothesis no. 4 is deemed false.**



**Figure 4.** “The need to go out – an escape from everyday problems and duties“ motivating factor by the age of the respondents (%).

Source: own study based on the interview survey.

### 3.2. The activity of Rural Homemakers' Clubs and subsidiarity of those organizations to the respondents

The RHCs are useful to the respondents mostly when it comes to social interactions (85.3% of the respondents). The above is strongly linked to the following two motivating factors: "the need to go out – an escape from daily problems and duties" and "performing a public function facilitates negotiations with local authorities".

The RHCs are helpful with social advancement to a much smaller group of the respondents (46.3%). Those respondents who indicated the relation between being a member of the RHC and their social advancement frequently specified that they were motivated to join the RHC because "performing a public function facilitates negotiations with the representatives of local authorities" and they were motivated because of "access to fairs thanks to the RHCs". To those who find the RHCs helpful in their professional work, "facilitated sale of handicrafts thanks to the RHC" and "access to fairs thanks to the RHC" were the motivating factors. It seems that in the case of the entrepreneurial RHC members their membership allows them to more easily promote their merchandise and reduces financial barriers to market entry. As a result the above is helpful both in their professional work and social advancement. **However, hypothesis no. 5, namely, the RHC membership is most helpful when it comes to social advancement, is not true.**

**Table 2.**

*The structure of survey responses to the question "In what areas is the Rural Homemakers' Club helpful to you?"*

| <b>The RHCs is helpful with:</b> | <b>No.</b> | <b>%</b> |
|----------------------------------|------------|----------|
| social interactions              | 116        | 85.3.    |
| social advancement               | 63         | 46.3.    |
| professional work                | 36         | 26.5.    |
| domestic responsibilities        | 35         | 25.7.    |
| Other responses                  | 30         | 22.1.    |

Source: own study based on the interview survey, N = 136.

Other areas in which the RHCs are helpful to their members which were not listed in the survey and were added by the respondents included education (5 respondents) which mostly involved sharing culinary experiences and opportunities related to taking part in training sessions through the RHCs. Two respondents stressed that their membership helps them overcome their own barriers and weaknesses. However, the respondents did not specify exactly if overcoming weaknesses involved an element related to culinary, social or other education. Approximately five of 126 respondents believe that the RHCs play an important role when it comes to networking. It is a particularly important aspect to migrants in the process of adapting to a local community. One of such respondents wrote that they like observing and analyzing the behavior of the RHC's members in different situations and drawing their own conclusions. To another respondent the RHC helps improve relations between the city and the village. Two respondents specified that their membership in the RHC is the source of social recognition and prestige. Based on the respondents' answers, the RHCs are also helpful in the process of

obtaining external funds for the inhabitants of small towns and villages, facilitating the promotion of products and organizing trips or events.

All surveyed Rural Homemakers' Clubs organized various events (table 3). The smallest percentage of the respondents indicated the RHCs' activities in the area of childcare services, e.g. during holidays.

**Table 3.**  
*Activities of the surveyed RHCs*

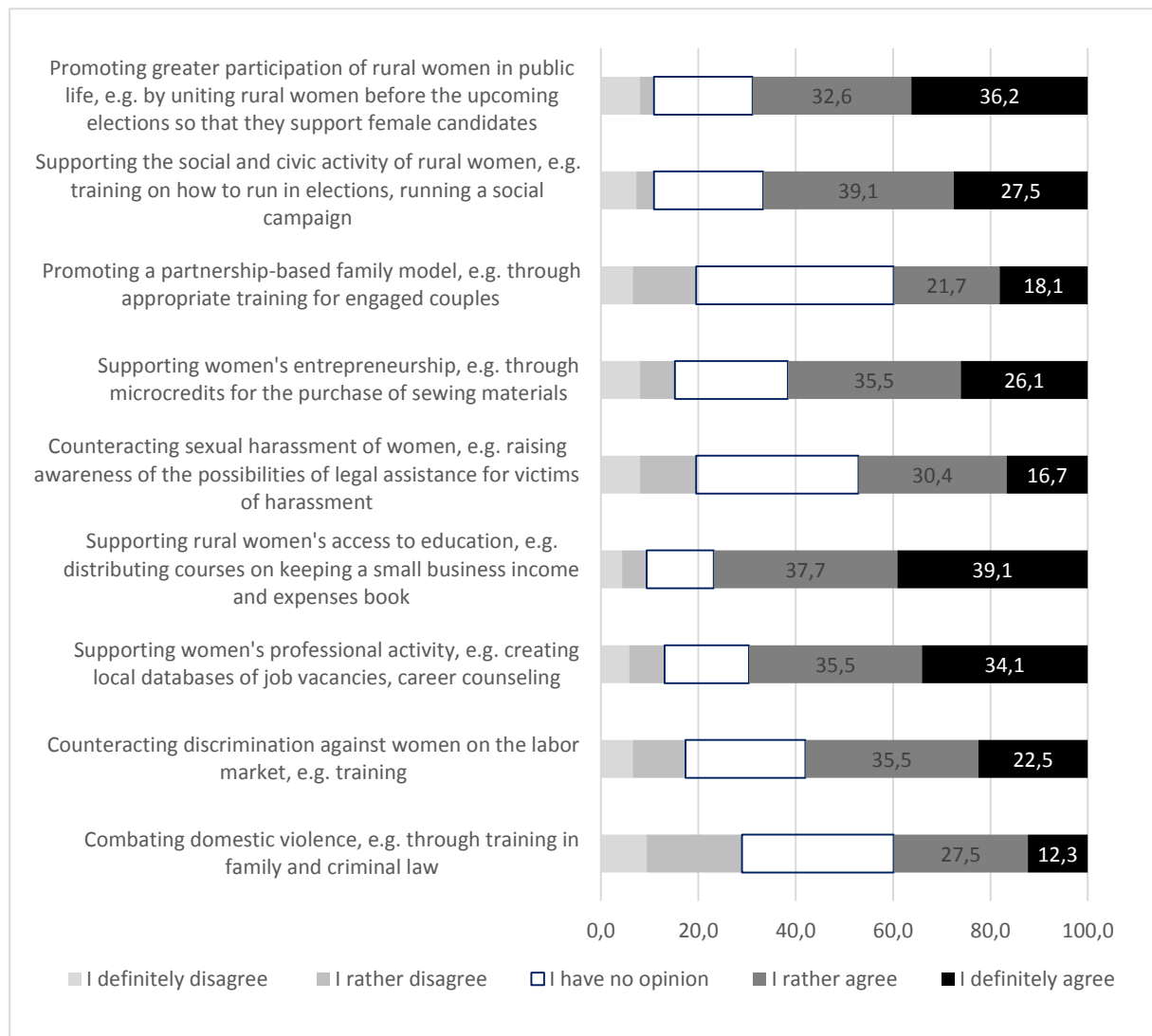
| Type of the RHC activity  | No. | %     |
|---|-----|-------|
| Organizing various events   | 126 | 100.0 |
| Participating in harvest festivals  | 121 | 96.0  |
| Traditional culinary activities   | 120 | 95.2  |
| Folk crafts, e.g. making harvest wreaths  | 107 | 84.9  |
| Obtaining funds from external sources, e.g. as part of assistance programs for agriculture    | 91  | 72.2  |
| Organizing training courses for local communities, e.g. cooking                               | 79  | 62.7  |
| Organizing trips for inhabitants  | 75  | 59.5  |
| Lending household equipment, e.g. a food processor  | 58  | 46.0  |
| Promoting good examples of female entrepreneurship in rural areas, e.g. new sources of income | 55  | 43.7  |
| Enhancing the village's appearance by organizing contests, e.g. for the most beautiful garden | 46  | 36.5  |
| Organizing meetings with the youth, e.g. discussions with interesting people                  | 45  | 35.7  |
| Organizing trips for inhabitants  | 45  | 35.7  |
| Organizing fitness classes  | 40  | 31.7  |
| Organizing folk bands   | 13  | 10.3  |
| Providing childcare services (e.g. during holidays)   | 10  | 7.9   |
| Other activities  | 21  | 16.7  |

Source: own study based on the interview survey, N = 136.

Other activities of the RHCs specified by the respondents included:

- educational classes, workshops for the youth, adults, other RHCs e.g. "Zielnik Pomlewski" (herbarium collection), "Późne grzybobranie" (late mushroom hunting), "Pszczoły nasi przyjaciele" (bees - our friends) (4 responses),
- supporting seniors, performing activities in the area of preventing addictions and counteracting domestic violence,
- fostering a more health-conscious attitude among the women from rural areas,
- collaboration with the Gmina Culture Center and territorial self-government authorities by spreading information about cultural events, e.g. among children,
- promoting the village by taking part in markets/supra-local fests, foreign trips aimed to promote the region and combined with meetings with the Polish diaspora,
- promoting environment-friendly attitudes among the inhabitants,
- collecting old photographs related to the village's history and inhabitants for the purpose of writing a book to preserve such historic heritage,
- collaborating with other NGOs, e.g. voluntary fire brigades (OSP) and co-organizing bike rallies, photo competitions, helping with charity fund-raisers.

According to the respondents the activities that are the most helpful to their villages included supporting rural women's access to education (Figure 5). Moreover, promoting rural women's greater participation in the public life was important to them. Thanks to understanding the expectations of the RHCs' members, the RHC goals can be adapted to fulfill those expectations which will motivate the members to be more active in the organization.



**Figure 5.** The activities which would be the most helpful in the area where your RHC operates (%).

Source: own study based on the interview survey, N = 136.

The important activity which the respondents find to be the most helpful is promoting the participation of women from rural areas in public life and supporting female candidates in elections, e.g. self-government elections. To that end training in participating in the elections would be helpful, too.

### 3.3. Factors that influence women's involvement in the activities of NGOs

Women had not been involved in non-governmental organizations until mid-19th century due to the fact that state education was only designed for men. There were private "boarding

schools” but girls did not belong to the broadly defined “student brethren”. Another reason was that women were not accepted as members of male organizations and there were no female organizations back then. The first female ideological and political union was the union of “Enthusiasts” led by Narcyza Żmichowska (Kamiński, 1971) (established in 1846). The third reason of the women’s non-participation in the organizations in the 19th century was that they had not been aware of their equality and having social rights equal to those of the men. Since they were unaware, they had no aspirations to establish or join the organizations.

Their youth was a short period which was a factor that also adversely affected their involvement. They were married young and frequently against their will (Lorenc, 2008) which did not contribute to improving living conditions. Frequently children that had been born died from poverty, athrepsia and diseases and many women had died in labor.

During the partitions their involvement was affected by the fact that women defended men arrested by the occupants for their participation in manifestations, e.g. against serfdom. The occupants found women to be so obstructive that Otto von Bismarck recognized the Polish woman as a dangerous foe to his expropriation policy. In one of his speeches he said: “(...) had it not been for their women I would have exterminated Poles long time ago” (Syguła, 2009). Thus, no wonder that one of the occupants, Austria, pursuant to the Act on associations banned women from joining political organizations (Lorenc, 2008).

Age and education are the factors that have affected rural women’s involvement in organizations. The research conducted in the 1970s shows that women aged 31-45, in particular those aged 36-40, had the highest rate of membership in the organizations in rural areas. Bednarski also noted the influence that education had on the increase of the rate of their membership in the organizations (Bednarski, 1978). To a lesser degree that concerns social and economic organizations which were not characterized by such material differences in the membership of women having different levels of education. Moreover the research conducted in the 1970s clearly shows greater involvement among the women from small- and medium-sized farms of the area between 5 and 15 ha. The women from the smallest farms of the area below 5 ha and from large farms (over 20 ha) were less involved in different kinds of organizations. Bednarski explained that phenomenon with class-related factors. The Communist doctrine connected women’s historic past and their future to Marxism. As part of the doctrine women were to take part in the “proletarian” class struggle of men in political parties established by them.

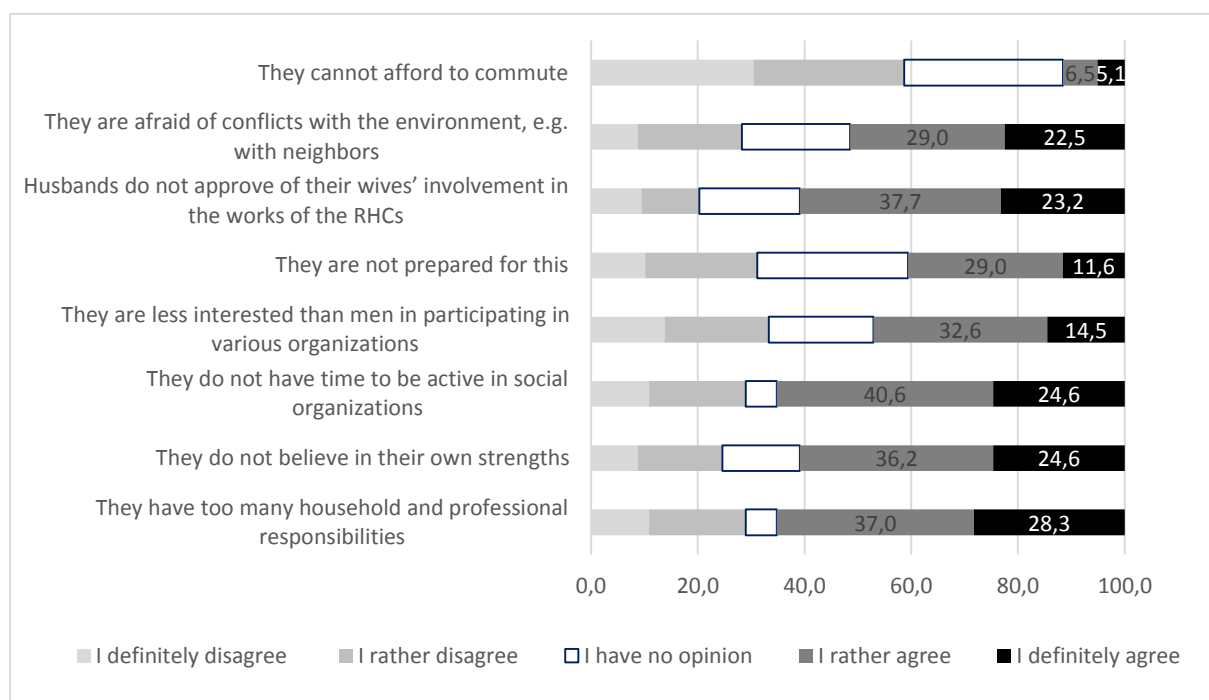
Other factors also had impact on women’s involvement in the works of political, social and economic organizations, for example: (Bednarski, 1978):

- the size of the village as measured by the number of families (larger villages are usually more active),
- the environment’s cultural traits (cultural and educational infrastructure, traditions of cultural activities, readership, development of radio and TV network),
- location (the proximity of large cities, and consequently the impact of urban civilization and culture on the inhabitant’s activities).

Bednarski and Gustowski in their work entitled “Społeczne uwarunkowania zdrowotności kobiet wiejskich” [Social conditions of rural women's health] (Bednarski, Gustowski, 1978) indicated that rural women had no free time. They worked too long and frequently too hard. Rural women did not have enough time to satisfy their physiological needs such as sleep, meals, rest and entertainment. The authors pointed out that women in rural areas often sleep less than physiologically required, i.e. 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night for adults. The absence of free time resulted in the excessive strain of their bodies and also limited the possibility of consulting a physician as needed; it also prevented them from broadening their basic medical knowledge.

Currently the major reason for the non-involvement of some women in the activities of the RHCs is the excessive number of household responsibilities (65% of respondents answered “I rather agree” “ and “I definitely agree” – Figure 6 – negative values refer to the answers “I definitely disagree” and “I rather disagree” for better visualization of the structure of the answers). Due to the excessive burden of household responsibilities women do not have time to get involved in social organizations (65%). Lack of confidence is another important reason why women do not get involved (61%). Many husbands are not willing to support women's involvement in such organizations as reflected in a similar percentage of answers (61%). Certainly there are few women who do not get involved in the RHCs because of problems with getting there (11%).

**The sixth hypothesis was confirmed and, indeed, in rural areas husbands frequently do not approve of their wives' involvement in the works of the RHCs.** Family patriarchy is still a feature of the Polish countryside and thus many women are limited in their aspirations.



**Figure 6.** Reasons of some women's non-involvement in the work of the RHCs by respondents (%).

Source: own study based on the interview survey, N = 136.

One of the respondents stated that lack of time is most frequently an excuse as people are not willing to contribute anything "for free". Other reasons of the lack of motivation to join the RHCs include: neighborhood disputes, divisions, political arrangements, internal disputes among the members of the RHCs, hostility, aversion to migrant women, jealousy and stubbornness, e.g. some women are reluctant to meet with current members of the Clubs. Another obstacle is the lack of childcare during their work for the RHC. The respondents also specified their lack of confidence and family conflicts caused by blaming women for spending time "nobody knows how and with whom".

In their research Tryfan, Rosner and Pięcek asked women to provide reasons for their non-involvement in the works of the organizations. The authors identified four major reasons for the women's non-involvement in NGOs (Tryfan, Rosner, Pięcek, 2003):

1. excessive number of domestic responsibilities,
2. recognizing family matters as a priority,
3. traditional views of the woman's role,
4. fear of local conflicts.

In another paper Tryfan (1968) argues that the amount of free time is not the most important determinant of the rural women's social engagement. Her research shows that wives of peasants-workers who bear the greatest burden of family and production responsibilities join the organizations more frequently than the wives of farmers who only practice one profession (Tryfan, 1968.). **Her research shows that the husbands' profession is an important factor when it comes to the rural women's involvement in organizations.** Every fourth respondent was unmarried. As regards the married respondents, only 13% of husbands were farmers. Despite work on the farm as declared by 38% of the respondents, it is clear that the connection of the families of the RHC members to agriculture is quite poor. It can be concluded that mainly the women from families poorly connected to farming, whose husbands practice two professions, are active in the RHCs. Apart from having a farm the husbands are sole traders and most frequently work as drivers, mechanics, teachers, electricians, managers of various units, IT specialists, office workers, warehouse workers, firemen or clerks.

Tryfan (1968) describes an interesting case of a woman who was elected a village head and the effect of her involvement on her husband. The husband believed that such division of functions was a shame and started to avoid working at home and on the farm to force his wife to resign from the position. Another interesting example is a father whose daughter was the Chairman of the Union of the Youth of Rural Areas. Rather than being proud of her, he said that "the girl should be watching her home instead of wandering from one meeting to another". Thus, those examples show that patriarchy does not favor the involvement of women in non-governmental organizations. Tryfan (1968) concludes that women from older age groups are the most involved ones. At that time maternal duties effectively hindered women's involvement in the organizations. The women's profession and education as well as any and all components of the notion of awareness are factors important to their involvement. The author points to the



relation between the women's readership activity and their social activity. The proximity of cities is a factor that has positive impact on the activities of women in political and economic organizations. However, artistic activities are not affected by that relationship as they are frequent both in peripheral areas and the areas located in the vicinity of towns or cities.

**Table 4.**

*The ranking of reasons of women's non-participation in the organizations*

| Details   | Responses |                |
|---|-----------|----------------|
|   | No.       | Percentage (%) |
| Excessive number of domestic and professional responsibilities  | 157       | 24.3           |
| They lack self-confidence                                       | 113       | 17.5           |
| They do not have time to get engaged in social organizations    | 98        | 15.2           |
| Compared to men they are less interested in such matters        | 96        | 14.9           |
| They are not prepared for that                                  | 80        | 12.4           |
| Many husbands do not encourage such involvement, do not approve | 51        | 7.9            |
| They are afraid of local conflicts, e.g. with their neighbors   | 34        | 5.3            |
| They cannot afford to get there                                 | 17        | 2.5            |

Source: Tryfan, Rosner, Pięcek, 2003, p. 100.

### 3.4. SWOT analysis of the surveyed organizations

Strong relations between the activists and clearly defined activities are the most frequently specified strengths of the Rural Homemakers' Clubs (Figure 7). According to the respondents, "having a choral ensemble" and a "strong relation to the National Union of Agricultural Clubs and Agricultural Organizations" are hardly regarded as strengths. The greatest number of respondents ("I definitely agree") indicated strong leadership.

The respondents also had an opportunity to specify, in their view, the strengths of the RHCs. The responses quite varied. One of the respondents was of the opinion that close collaboration with a local elementary school was a strength enabling the RHC to educate children in ecology and production of organic foods. To another person co-operation with seniors and NGOs were strengths.

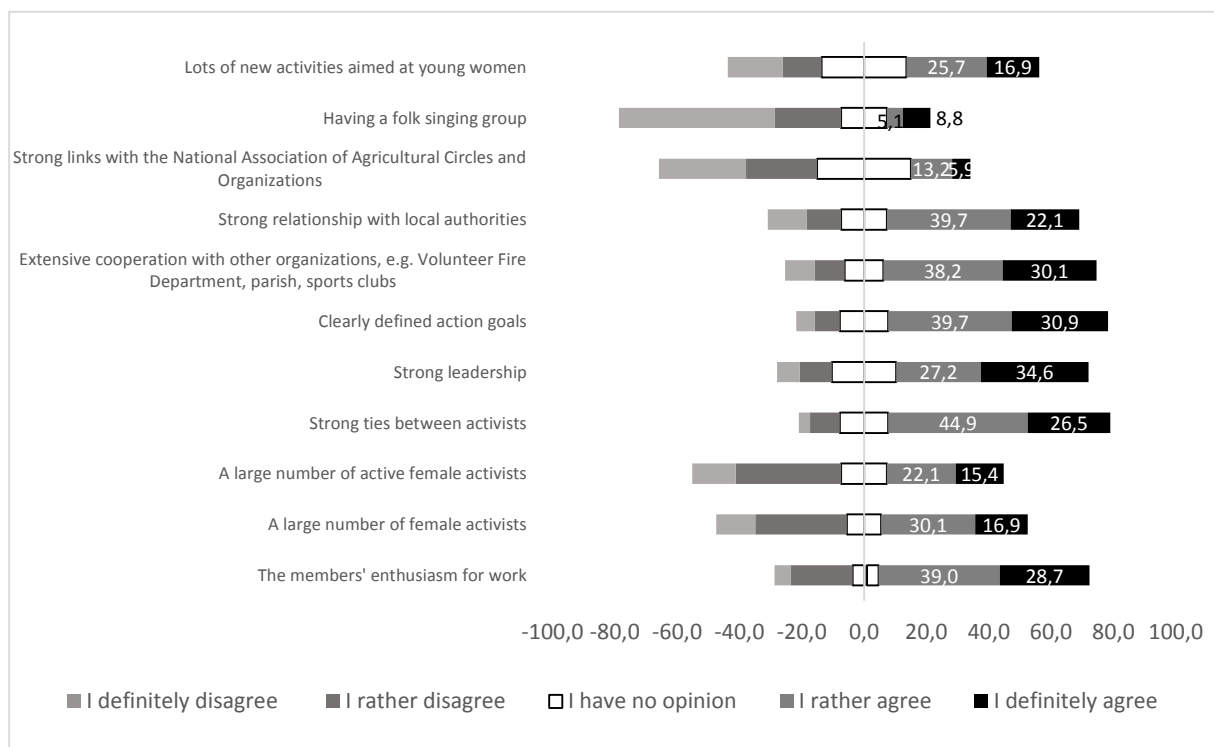
Some RHCs recognize manual skills of its members and maintaining traditions as their strengths. Apart from handicraft skills another strength is acquiring new skills and knowledge from others (lifelong learning). Having own cabaret and willingness to enter contests are also regarded as the strengths of some of the RHCs. Engaging in promoting their villages is yet another RHC's strong side. Frequently the RHC is the only form of women's organization in the country allowing to foster personal contacts between the inhabitants, often in a family atmosphere.

One of the respondents mentioned the RHC's experience in obtaining subsidies as a strength, as the Club continues the work of an association of a different kind. By definition, the Rural Homemakers' Club is a group of people who want to work together to develop their village, foster human relations. It involves local co-operation. One of the respondents specified "youth and commitment" as an opportunity for the RHC.

Other strengths included:

- age diversity,
- women who have strong character,
- cooking and original ideas for the Club's overall activities,
- mutual friendships,
- openness to the needs of individuals in crisis, e.g. refugees,
- social activities benefitting the inhabitants,
- creating handicraft and participating in contests,
- willingness to act,
- promoting the village in the poviats and voivodeships,
- the ratio of active to inactive RHC members.

Networking and co-operation with other organizations is a strength of approx. 68% of the surveyed RHCs (Figure 7). In the case of seven out of ten RHCs, their members' work enthusiasm (approx. 68% of the responses) are also strengths.



**Figure 7.** Strengths of the Rural Homemakers' Clubs (%).

Source: own study based on the interview survey.

One of the weaknesses of the RHCs is the lack of interest in the Clubs' new ideas among young women, activists (Figure 8). Weak leadership is the lowest risk. Approximately 50% of the RHCs do not have sufficient funds for the performance of their tasks. Another weakness is the lack of a folk choir ensemble (34% of responses) and a poor relationship with the National Union of Agricultural Clubs and Organizations (32% of respondents).

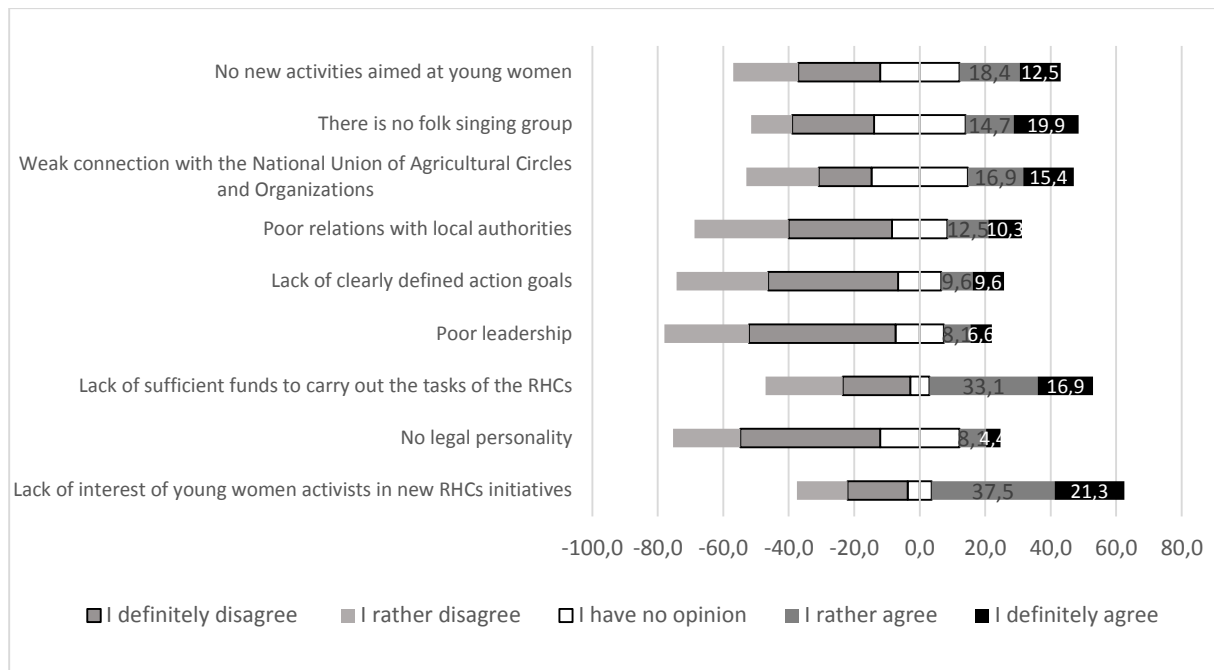
Other weaknesses specified by the respondents apart from those presented in Figure 8 included failure to “identify with social good”, “mentality”, “lack of a serious attitude to the RHC”. One of the respondents noted that excluding new members and failure to get the inhabitants involved in the activities of the RHC are also weaknesses. One of the weaknesses of another RHC located in a large village lies in the fact that the majority of the inhabitants work in a city nearby and that the village inhabitants mostly have migrant background and are not interested in their place of residence. One of the respondents noticed that local communities do not quite understand the nature of the RHC with a legal personality. Three surveyed RHCs do not have their seats and there is no such perspective, hence they do not have a place for their organizational meetings. In some villages their inhabitants have misconceptions shared by some of the RHC members that hinder part of the initiatives. Malaise and apathy are weaknesses observed in one of the RHCs in a rural community being a former state-run-farm. In some places the fact that there are too few inhabitants resulting in too few members of the RHC can be an impediment to the organization's operations. In some RHCs the inhabitants do not have the sense of belonging to the community and disputes among neighbors have adverse impact on the functioning of the RHCs.

Several respondents specified finances as weaknesses, for example:

- a low budget,
- inability to plan long-term activities involving funds from external sources.

A portion of responses regarding the Clubs' weaknesses pertained to interpersonal relations in the Club, e.g.:

- arguments between the members, internal conflicts and rumors,
- too few active members, lack of interest or drive to work among some members,
- absence of people aged around 35 interested in getting involved,
- being a closed circle of members engaged from the beginning, little interest among the members to welcome new ones, working on the principle that “it will be done" usually with the same persons getting involved in a given activity - imprecision, lack of clearly defined tasks,
- dominance of young women with different goals,
- lack of interest among some of the members.



**Figure 8.** Weaknesses of the surveyed RHCs in the opinion of their members (%).

Source: own study based on the interview survey, N = 136.

According to the respondents a major threat to the functioning of the RHCs is the declining importance of the “real world” among the youth (approx. 60% of the respondents) and the young women’s lack of interest in joining the RHC (Figure 9). Approximately 55% of the respondents specified that the inhabitants’ lack of interest in the activities of the RHC was a threat. Interestingly, 43% of the respondents believed that the growing importance of the Internet in social life is a threat to the RHC. Only approx. 40% of the respondents regarded difficulty with obtaining funds for the operations of the RHC as a threat. The perception of the Rural Homemakers’ Club as an agricultural organization was identified as a threat in the case of four out of ten organizations.

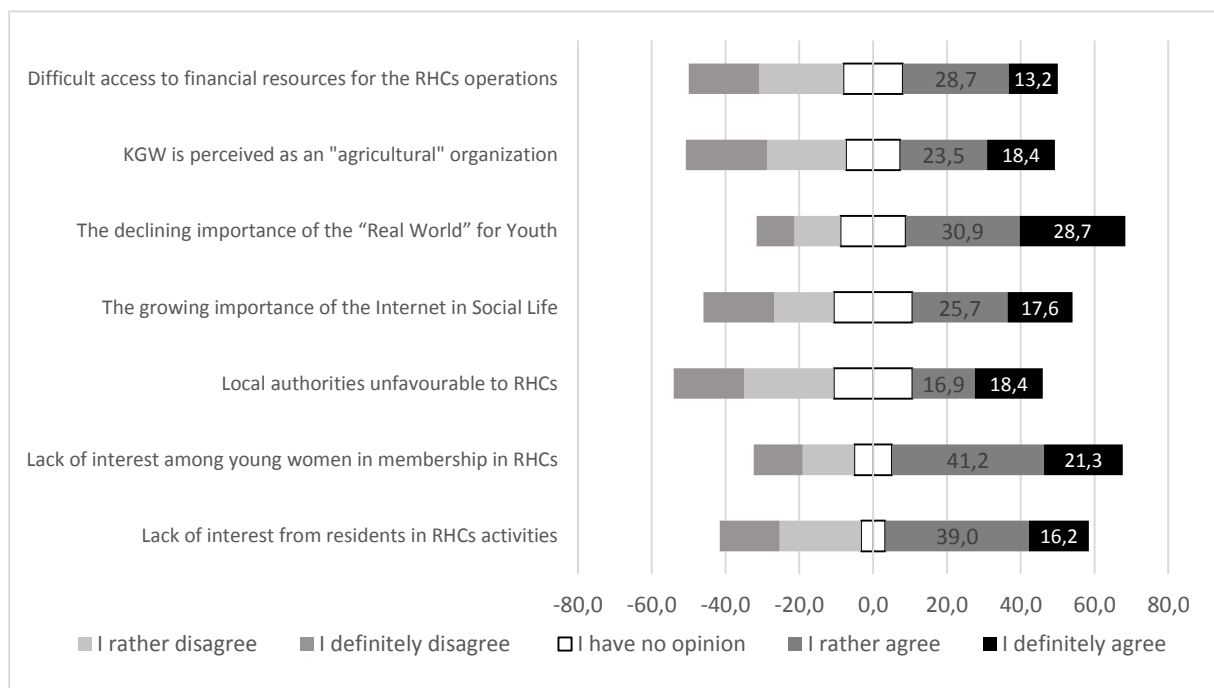
According to some of the respondents one of the threats is the perception of the RHCs as fossilized and uninteresting. Perhaps a country-wide campaign showing their attractiveness could help present their modern face. Treating the RHCs as a place of meetings of elderly ladies (misperception, stereotyping) does not foster their growth and is a threat to the RHCs as organizations.

Another threat is the presence of people who do nothing but criticize. People who try to play off the RHC members or the Club against other organizations without noticing opportunities for the entire community are regarded as a threat. Lack of openness of the society, an omnipresent demanding attitude to other people are threats to the RHC, too.

Other threats to the RHCs as organizations that the respondents specified included:

- a growing demanding attitude and individualism,
- lack of the need to build relationships,
- lack of co-operation with and support from the authorities,
- lack of legal or accounting assistance from, e.g. the Gmina office,

- a declining social activity,
- competition (other RHCs, an association, a foundation),
- rumors, slander, disrespect of the involved members,
- inability to obtain funds for the RHCs without legal personality,
- frequent conflicts with a village head,
- too many formalities in the process of obtaining funds,
- lack of support from gmina offices in the registration process, the organizations' politicization,
- lack of supporting people,
- aggression on the part of the authorities and intimidating the inhabitants,
- the society closing itself off to other people and a negative attitude to anything going on around,
- lack of funds to implement attractive activities that can be of interest to children and youth.



**Figure 9.** Threats to the RHCs in the opinion of respondents (%).

Source: own study based on the interview survey, N = 136.

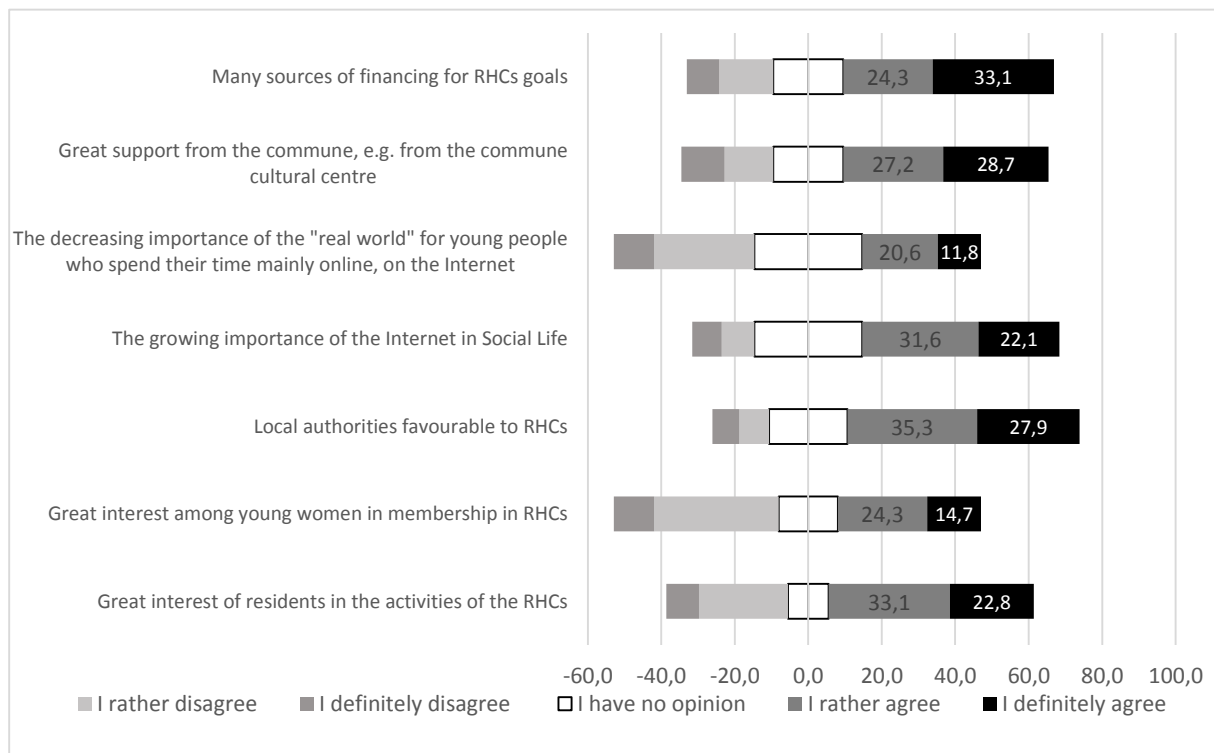
A positive attitude of the local authorities (Figure 10) and numerous sources of financing the activities of the RHCs are perceived as opportunities by the members of the RHCs. The declining importance of the "real world" to the youth who mostly spend their time online is hardly recognized as an opportunity.

To some RHCs co-operation with a local elementary school, the possibility of the implementation of shared educational programs in the area of maintaining cultural heritage (financed with EU funds) is an opportunity. Access to sale via the Internet gives the RHCs new opportunities related to sale of folk handicraft. Growing interest in the RHCs as an organization

and their financial support by the State or self-government are obvious opportunities for the RHCs.

Other opportunities specified by the RHCs include:

- a natural setting,
- potential of local environment,
- co-operation with other organizations,
- joining forces and partnerships with neighboring RHCs – integration,
- taking part in charitable works,
- involvement in the RHCs being en vogue as a trend created by the government of the Republic of Poland,
- activities aimed at the integration of senior inhabitants,
- strengthening social relations.



**Figure 10.** Opportunities for the RHCs in the opinion of their members (%).

Source: own study based on the interview survey, N = 136.

#### 4. Summary and discussion

The respondents mostly included people aged below 50 who are married and have tertiary education. The majority of the surveyed women were hardly involved in agricultural production and farming. Typically the surveyed women were engaged in non-agricultural work.

The Rural Homemakers' Clubs preserve rural cultural heritage for future generations. Every second surveyed Club is engaged in gainful operations as an organization. Almost every second organization engages in networking which mostly involves its co-operation with voluntary fire brigades, self-government and other associations.

In the 1990s women worked longer on farms than now. A major factor motivating the respondents to become involved in the activities of the RHC is personal development and willingness to help others. Thanks to such involvement women have higher self-esteem and are able to adjust to a group being important to the community. Integration with other people and willingness to do something with others are goals of rural women who are active members of the Clubs. To some entrepreneurial women the improvement of the relation with the market thanks to the RHC is an important factor motivating them to take part in the activities of the RHCs. To seniors the RHCs are an incentive to go out. Therefore the Rural Homemakers' Club helps with social interactions.

The Rural Homemakers' Clubs engage in interesting local initiatives and influence local communities organizing local events and implementing a number of unique initiatives. Those initiatives are related to education, promotion of local tourist attractions, maintaining local tradition.

Factors that affect women's activities in NGOs such as RHCs have changed over time. During the period of the partitions of Poland, non-governmental organizations allowed women to help their husbands arrested by the occupants. After the World War II women from small farms as well as from the very big ones were more active. At present women in rural areas have fewer responsibilities related to agriculture. However, it does not mean that they have more time which can be devoted to being involved in NGOs. The husbands continue to be the factor discouraging women to become involved in the RHCs.

The hypotheses that were validated:

- leadership in the RHCs should take the form of coaching leadership because personal development was the major motivating factor of the women's involvement in those organizations.
- In rural areas the factors that push women to participate in the RHCs were "the need to act", "integration with others" and "interactions with people".
- Willingness to help others is a factor characteristic of unmarried rather than married people.
- The most important disincentive for people to get involved in the activities of the RHCs is failure to accept such activities by life partners.

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