

PARADIGM OF MISSION AND VALUES IN THE ACTIVITIES OF SOCIAL ECONOMY ENTITIES: THE EXAMPLE OF RURAL WOMEN CIRCLES

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Purpose: The aim of this paper is to verify the mission paradigm using the activities of social economy entities: rural women's circles. An analysis of mission perceptions and values declared by women from rural housewives' circles in the study area was carried out. Then it was verified whether there are similarities in mission components in social entities compared to entities of the economic (classical) type.

Design/methodology/approach: The main theme was respondents' perceptions of mission and values. This paper presents the results of the Author's research, obtained through a questionnaire survey and the use of the field group interview method. All surveys were conducted among women active in rural women's circles. The hypothesis was developed and verified based on the deductive method. The results are presented in descriptive and tabular form. The thematic scope of the study includes issues of declaration and perception of the mission of the rural women's circles and declarations of values that guide women in their activities.

Findings: The research confirmed the hypothesis adopted in the article, indicating the alternative nature of the mission paradigm in social economy entities, compared to the dominant paradigm of classical economics of heterodox economics (on the example of rural women's circles). This is primarily supported by the listed mission attributes and values, which differ significantly from classical economics. In social economy entities, the mission refers primarily to intangible values, rejects individualism in the mission, and does not aim exclusively (or at all) for economic profit. As a rule, social economy entities are based on collective action and social solidarity, which is in contrast to the market economic model, focused on individual success and competition.

Research limitations/implications: Important limitations relate to the limited availability of data in the case of a survey of village circles. Another issue is the subjectivity of interpretation, occurring in qualitative or deductive research. The lack of standardization is also an important problem - in the case of the data presented in this article, it should be considered as case studies and not standardized data.

Originality/value: The article verifies popular management theories and compares classical management concepts of capitalist economy entities with social economy entities - using the example of rural women's circles. The article brings a new perspective on selected aspects of heterodox economics, referring to management's chosen tools (mission and values).

Keywords: mission, rural women circles, paradigm.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

A paradigm, broadly described by Kuhn (2020), is an emerging concept in many fields of science, including the social sciences. Its function is to outline a theoretical framework to be used to define and explain certain socio-economic phenomena. Thanks to paradigms, it is possible to use appropriate tools for scientific analysis, to make comparisons or to observe changes in approaches to certain phenomena and describe them properly. In the management sciences, paradigms refer to certain models of behaviour and activities in different organizations and entities, described by Ansoff and Oblój (1985), Kotler et al. (2001), Porter (2006) or Drucker in his “The Practice of Management” (2005). Establishing a praxeological framework makes it possible to systematically examine and evaluate these assumptions and then make paradigm shifts. These changes are often driven by the evolution (or revolution) of social or cultural values or innovations in technologies (Sułkowski, 2012). Management sciences are praxeological sciences, as they aim to design and plan methods for effective action (Olejnik et al., 2013). One of the tools for designing and planning effective actions in economic or social organizations is the mission statement.

The mission in an organization is largely based on its values, defined as moral and ethical principles, which are adhered to by the members of an organization (employees and management) and define how they act (Lynch, 2021). It is, in a way, an overarching goal that defines the meaning of an entity's existence and defines the reason for its actions (David, 2017).

Mission is a rather broad topic and there is still no clear definition of it (Henry, 2021; Witek-Crabb, 2008). Instead, it can be described by many synonyms, such as values, goals, creed, credo, purpose, philosophy, beliefs, and principles (Henry, 2021; David, 2017, Porter, Kramer, 2011; Drucker, 2005). According to Porter and Kramer (2011) and Drucker (2005), a mission statement is a fundamental element of ‘self-identification’ that, in an organization (enterprise), answers the questions ‘who we are’, ‘why we act’ ‘whom we serve’, “how we achieve our goals”. The mission, therefore, defines the identity of a given organization, while in theoretical terms, as a paradigm, it can be defined as a certain theoretical framework that defines how a given organization or entity defines its values, objectives, ways of operating, and its impact on the external environment (Sułkowski, 2012).

The concept of mission will vary depending on the economic sector. It will be of a different nature in profit-maximizing organizations than in non-profit organizations. This article analyses the concept of mission in social economy entities, i.e. those that are guided by different values than the profit-oriented entities typical of mainstream economics. Social economy entities do not exclusively aim to achieve economic profit, as they focus primarily on so-called social profit in their activities (Kalinowski, 2007). One interesting example of social economy entities is the rural women's circles. Their main activities focus on supporting local communities and rural development rather than strictly on economic gain, so their mission and values will differ from those formulated by traditional economic entities (Zybala, 2022).

2. Methods

The article aims to verify the mission paradigm on the example of the activities of social economy entities: rural housewives' circles. They were chosen as a case study because of their specificity and the observed growing importance in Poland. They were therefore selected for research as an interesting case study. The article focuses on finding answers to two research questions based on the chosen entities:

Q1. *What is the perception of the mission statement by the members of the rural women's circles in the study area and are there similarities in the mission statement components compared to economic-type entities?*

Q2. *What are the women's declarations of the values that guide them in carrying out their activities, which are the foundations of this type of organization?*

The research questions were proposed to be answered in the form of a hypothesis:

H1. *The components included in the mission of social economy entities of the rural women's circles and the values on which the mission is built differs from the paradigm dominant in classical economics, resulting in the fact that it can be described as an alternative paradigm.*

The hypothesis was verified using the deductive method, starting from general theory and assumptions and testing them against specific cases. The starting point was the existing theories on the classical paradigm of mission and values, embedded in the management sciences. This was followed by verification of the basic assumptions made in the paper based on observations, interviews (qualitative research), and survey results (quantitative research).

Spatially, the research focused on the Polish Carpathian Macroregion. This macro-region is characterized by particular cultural and natural values but faces multiple problems of a socio-economic nature. Above all, there is a high fragmentation of farms, higher unemployment than in other regions (up to almost 8% in the southern districts of Małopolska and Podkarpackie) and infrastructural problems, which negatively affect the development of entrepreneurship (BDL GUS 2024, www.bdl.stat.gov.pl) The survey was conducted in an area covering 14 districts of Małopolska, 14 districts of Podkarpackie and 4 districts of Śląskie.

The thematic scope of the study includes issues concerning the perception of mission and values in entities such as rural women's circles (KGW). They are social economy entities focused on the realization of non-economic goals. KGWs in Poland have a long-standing tradition (Chmielewska, 2021; Janowski, 2023; Szymańska, 2022). Since 2018, they have been receiving financial support for their activities; hence, new KGWs have been established, and many informal groups of rural women have registered and have been operating formally since 2018. Currently, there are almost 16,000 rural women's circles registered in Poland (www.krkgw.arimr.gov.pl). In addition to this, there are still groups of informal or unregistered rural women's associations in Poland, so the total number of such women's organizations is difficult to obtain.

The research conducted was empirical in nature and was carried out in two stages: the first was a survey (quantitative) and the second was in-depth interviews (qualitative research). All surveys were carried out among registered rural women's circles from the study area, using data available on the ARMA website "National Register of Rural Housewives" Circles' (www.krkgw.arimr.gov.pl).

The survey was conducted using the CAWI survey method. The questionnaire was distributed to the presidents or representatives of women's circles from the study region via email or social media. The research sample was selected taking into account a confidence level of $\alpha = 0.95$ and assuming a maximum error of 0.03. The survey contained closed questions with a cafeteria of answers. This resulted in 389 returns from respondents. The survey elicited responses on the components of the mission statement of the respective women circles.

Qualitative research was carried out using group in-depth interviews. The research consisted of 10 face-to-face interviews with groups of members of rural women's circles. Each group represented a separate women's circle. Between 6 and 14 people participated in each interview. The interviews focused on exploring the personal experiences of the study participants, eliciting responses to open-ended questions. The interview approach was individualized to each study group, combining flexibility with openness. Each women's circle is characterized by distinctiveness and different experiences, hence the interviews were intersubjective. During the interviews, the focus was on the women's personal feelings about the mission and values that guide them in running their village circle.

3. Results

As already mentioned, the research resulted in 389 questionnaires and 10 in-depth interviews, with 99% of respondents being female. The average age of respondents was 46 years (median 45 years, max 78, min 15 years). Respondents defined their involvement in KGW as experience in years. It turned out that on average women have been involved in KGWs for less than 7 years. The most frequent value was 5 years, the highest value was 52 years of work for KGWs and the lowest value was 3 months. The correlation between age and experience in KGW work was examined and found to be non-significant (0.2), so there is no effect of age on the period of activity in the circle expressed in years. Table 1 shows the respondents' declarations on the mission of their activity, expressed in specific objectives.

Table 1.*Mission statement in surveyed rural women`s circles*

Specification	Attributes of the KGW mission				
	„To act”	„To connect”	„To help”	„To inspire”	„To motivate”
Number of indications	144	133	47	38	23
% of indications	37.4	34.5	12.2	9.9	6.0
The average age (in years)	49.3	42.8	47.6	42.9	44.6
Experience in KGW (the average, in years)	6.8	6.2	8.0	5.8	7.3

Source: own research, survey (N = 389).

Most respondents described the mission of KGWs as being active. ‘To act’, according to almost 40% of women, best defines the mission of this type of entity. Among those who chose this answer, the largest group was mature women (average age 50). A large group of respondents (around 35%) felt that their mission is to ‘To connect’, so integration and inclusion activities are what they do. Given the number of responses, it can be concluded that these two mission attributes, i.e. ‘To act’ and ‘To connect’, are the most important for female respondents.

Table 2, on the other hand, accommodates value statements, understood as the foundations of the activities of the women`s circles, certain beliefs, and ideas that guide the members of these groups.

Table 2.*Declared values in the surveyed women`s circles*

Specification	Women's declared values of KGW						
	„Commitment”	„Friendship”	„Joy”	„Work”	„Affiliation”	„Care”	„Leadership”
Number of indications	322	269	251	133	100	49	13
% of indications	28.3	23.7	22.1	11.7	8.8	4.3	1.1
The average age (in years)	45.7	45.3	46.8	48.7	45.1	43.7	42
Experience in KGW (the average, in years)	6.8	6.7	6.5	7.8	6.0	6.0	4.1

Source: own research, survey (N = 389).

According to the surveys, most respondents favoured values such as: ‘Commitment’, ‘Friendship’ and ‘Joy’. The least number of women indicated ‘leadership’ as a value they follow in their work in the village circle, with the youngest women, which may indicate future women leaders of this type of organization. Considering the women's responses, the pursuit of relational values (friendship, joy) and personal commitment is evident.

4. Discussion

A mission statement in an organization is a statement of purpose and values that guide an entity in its activities and can be a means of achieving competitive advantage (Porter, 2006). Classical management theory as described by e.g. David (2017) or Drucker (2005) emphasizes the importance of mission in the management of organizations. Porter (2006) in his management work outlines a strategic framework for organizations, which often starts with a clearly defined mission. The mission statement explains quite clearly not only the motives of the organization but also how the members of an organization act or are inspired to do so. The mission statement is not intended to define specific outcomes but rather serves to motivate its members, provides a general direction for action, builds a specific image, and sets the tone for the activities of a given organization (Dyduch, 2021).

In economic organizations, the purpose of the mission is to meet the needs of customers/consumers and achieve competitive advantage (Porter, 2006). In such a mission, there is also a place for product and technology (innovation). Contemporary management concepts place increasing emphasis on other resources, which Sułkowski (2012) calls symbolic, such as intellectual capital and social capital. Increasingly, the statements of market organizations also focus on people; they specify whom the organization wants to serve. They link economic activity to social benefits (Porter, Kramer, 2011; Kafel, 2011).

A mission statement in the traditional capitalist paradigm can include many components. The most common are: consumers (recipients, beneficiaries), products or services, markets, technology, philosophy, self-concept, concern for public image, concern for employees, etc. In profit-oriented organizations, the mission statement is often formulated by the company's owner, board of directors, or shareholders and is then communicated to managers at various levels and employees. In some organizations, managers and employees are directly involved in the formulation of the company's mission (Porter, 2006; David, 2017).

On the other hand, in social economy entities such as rural housewives' circles, the mission refers primarily to the needs of the organization's members and the immediate environment (neighbours, friends, family, villagers). It focuses more on social values, is created by its founders and members, and responds to the needs of the particular group, community, or locality for which it operates (Kamiński, Marcysiak, 2013). According to the research conducted in the selected rural housewives' circles, the process of concretizing the mission is informal in these organizations, but it is more participatory in nature.

As already mentioned, organizations can formulate their mission statements in different ways, depending on the specific objectives and values that the organization manifests. How objectives are concretized is described in the research by, among others, Defourny and Nyssens (2008), where they point out the distinct characteristics of these entities compared to economic profit-oriented entities, so their mission will also differ. The mission in entities such

as farmers' circles is referred to as a “social mission”, a “volunteer mission” (Defourny, Nyssens, 2017), or even a social mission (Borzaga in the OECD study edited by Noya, 2009). Table 3 shows the characteristics of the most important components of the mission of economic and not-for-profit organizations, as determined by the own research (10 group interviews) and the literature review.

Table 3.

Mission components in the dominant paradigm and in the alternative paradigm

Specification	Mission components in the dominant (capitalist) paradigm:	Mission components in an alternative paradigm (on the example of rural women's associations):
Main goal	Economic (generating and attracting additional resources)	Social (meeting the needs of the local community)
The method of managing	Constituted and formal	Democratic and informal
The goal of management	Action	Action
Profit characteristics	Economic (growth, profitability, revenue, turnover, etc.)	Social (relationships, friendship, helping the weaker or excluded, care, interests, etc.)
Values	Economic, instrumental	Relational
Level of mission formalization	High	Low
Perspective	Short-term, time-specific (deadlines, plans, strategies, policies, systems, tactics)	Long-term, strategic, time-unspecific
Member involvement	Superior-subordinate relationships, greater individualism	Emotional relationships and greater collectivism

Source: developed based on 10 group interviews and literature: Drucker (2005), David (2017), Porter (2006), Kafel (2010), Dyduch (2021).

In both approaches (Table 3), mission can be thought of as taking action to achieve a goal, and therefore the pursuit of effective management (Drucker, 2005). In both the paradigm dominant in classical economics and alternative economics, activity, and action are the basis for functioning. KGW's women see the results of their actions, they perceive their agency, and therefore one of the synonyms of mission for them is ‘action’.

On the basis of the research conducted and the analysis of the literature, the research hypothesis (*H1*) indicates the alternative nature of the mission paradigm in social economy entities, such as rural women's circles (KGWs), compared to the dominant paradigm of classical economics, was confirmed (Table 3). This hypothesis is supported by the factors presented in Table 3 and is primarily an alternative in goals: the mission of KGWs focuses mainly on intangibles such as supporting local communities, cultivating traditions, and integrating and activating residents. This differentiates it from the dominant paradigm, which prioritizes the maximization of financial benefits (profit, revenue, turnover) in profit-oriented enterprises. Another point that may indicate confirmation of the hypothesis is the apparent rejection of individualism in the mission statements of rural women's circles.

These entities are often based on collective action and social solidarity, which is in contrast to the market economic model, which focused on individual success and competition.

Thus, in the alternative paradigm, the mission statement in entities such as rural women's circles focuses on social benefits and long-term values, where financial profit, if present, is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. While in the classical capitalist economics model, an organization's mission statement often emphasizes its product/service, innovation, efficiency and the pursuit of maximizing financial performance as its main objective (Lynch, 2021; Ansoff, Obłój, 1985; Drucker, 2005). The mission paradigm in social economy entities such as rural women's circles, exemplifies an alternative approach to organizational activity. It is based on social values, local commitment and collectivism, which differentiates it from the dominant paradigm focused on market efficiency and individual benefits, so important in economically profit-driven organizations.

The mission in social economy entities allows to pursue not so much economic goals - these are negligible in rural women's circles - as social goals, which should be measured in the long term. The women of the surveyed KGWs were able to define social gain, often intuitively. They assessed the benefits of their mission as significant, primarily by creating space for social integration and activation of different social groups, offering support to lonely people, or pursuing common passions and interests. Added value, according to the respondents, is created as a result of activities for the common good and does not always have a direct and immediate translation into material values (economic gain). Fulfilling the (often informal and relational) mission of social economy entities should be seen as an investment in human resources and building social cohesion. These activities can be extremely helpful in combating negative demographic changes such as the aging of the rural population, exclusions, and loneliness (Szymańska, 2022; Hausner, 2007). It should, therefore, be emphasized that although the effects of the activities of social economy entities may be difficult to capture in the short term, they bring social and financial benefits (measurable - in the long term). Improving the quality of life of women in villages, strengthening their entrepreneurial attitudes or supporting the local economy are important results of the mission of these entities. Such entities become a place for stimulating sustainable development at the local level, both in terms of the social and environmental spheres, promoting the idea of sustainable management of resources (human, natural, cultural).

5. Summary

The issues presented in the article relate to the comparison of selected attributes characterizing the dominant paradigm in classical economics to selected elements of an alternative paradigm, characteristic of social economics. The article aimed to verify the

mission paradigm on the example of the activities of social economy entities: rural women's circles. Based on the analyses performed, it should be stated that the study of this type of phenomenon requires a different objective and the application of different research methods than in the case of entities of the dominant (capitalist) economy, where verification, analysis, generalization and then programming of changes are performed. In the case of the issue analyzed in this paper, the research objective set by the Author was to analyze, understand and describe the phenomenon/problem under study. The paper focuses on seeking answers to two research questions: 'What is the perception of the mission by the members of the rural women's circles in the studied area?' and 'What are the women's declarations of the values that guide them in conducting their activities, which are the foundations of this types of organization?' and then comparing these elements in classical (capitalist) organizations and in social economy entities.

In the dominant paradigm, the concept and understanding of an organization's mission is based on causal and recursive relationships between components of reality (resources). In contrast, the alternative approach requires the observation of multidirectional and interdisciplinary knowledge. The cognitive-methodological reflection is multifaceted in this case. In the case of social economy entities of the KGWs type, the relations between the components of reality are interdependent, but can often run as a unit. The structures of these organisms are poorly delineated or non-existent.

The missions of rural women's circles are usually not very formal compared to large organizations. They often only exist in the consciousness (or subconsciousness) of the members of these organizations. These missions pursue various social, cultural, and developmental goals in the region where the KGW focuses its activities. Most often, the mission and values of KGWs are not communicated to a wider audience; they represent a value for a given, narrow group (KGWs members and their families) and village residents. Strictly speaking, the mission and values are relational, not instrumental. Nevertheless, they are usually strongly rooted in a given community or informal group, giving a sense of community and affiliation. Although this alternative paradigm (heterodox economics) should be considered differently from paradigms in classical economics, it finds its place in research procedures and can be subjected to scientific analysis.

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