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Rural heritage and creative female entrepreneurs

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Introduction

The paper presents the main findings of the research on Creative female entrepreneurs in rural Hungary in the context of cultural heritage. The research analysed a new group of Hungarian rural society: the creative female entrepreneurs. The main focus of the analysis was the interconnection between traditional gender roles and creative business activities.

Over the last few decades, the Hungarian countryside has gone through many changes. Rurality has become an object of consumption and the most important elements of rural representation are traditions, community, nature, peace, local specialities and rustic fashion. More and more rural places are promoting themselves as nostalgia destinations providing traditional rural culture and local heritage. Almost all the settlements in rural Hungary organise rural festivals and events based on their local culture and traditions several times a year. Peasant gastronomic products, ethnic/minority food and local handmade crafts are the main products for these kinds of events. They events and services varying degrees of success, but some of them have gained regional or national attention (Csurgó 2004, 2013; Csurgó and Nagy Kalamász 2007; Fejős and Szijártó 2000; Pusztai 2003, 2007). Parralel with this processes it have seen a relative flourishing of small women's businesses engaged in the production of nostalgia based products and services. These businesses what are regarded as sectors involving "women's skills" (Anthopoulou 2010) such as rural tourism services, production of food (chees, jam, pastry, strudel, etc.), production of folk arts (embroidery, carpets, ceramics, etc.).

Empirical studies all over from Europe
show that these economic activities seem to be the most attractive field for rural women (Bessière,1998; Anthopoulou 2010).

Several research findings show that rural women generally start small-scale businesses compared to men. As Anthopoulou (2010) stated „small business offers an alternative to wage labour given the uncertain availability of paid work in rural areas." The flexible working conditions that are a concomitant of small business ownership often makes it possible for women better to reconcile family and work duties (Bock, 2004; Oughton et al., 2003).

The paper seeks to understand how creative activities of women influence the role of women in the family and in the local society.

Methods

The primary research in this paper is based on analysis interviews with female entrepreneurs from seven micro regions of Hungary: Őrség region, Bicske micro region, Mezőtúr micro region, Derecske-Létavértes micro-region, Kalocsa micro region, Hajdúság region, North-Mátra region. The data was collected using qualitative methods: document-analysis, semi-structured interviews, transect walking and participant observation. The research focus on focus on female entrepreneurs and also the interrelationships between local heritage, traditions and development. This includes 40 semi-structured interviews with female entrepreneurs. The case-studies were conducted between September 2016 and February 2018.

Results

The interview analysis shows that women are over-represented in cultural heritage based activities such as traditional food and craft production and rural tourism services. In the studied regions, women play a central role in heritage-based development, many tourism associations, guesthouses, local produce shops, local markets and local network groups. All are led by local women. In almost all settlements in the studied regions female entrepreneurs can be found producing traditional local products such as goats' cheese, dairy products, jams, syrups, oils, local cakes, embroidery, ceramics, jewelry, bags, etc. They sell their products on site, in local markets or at regional festivals and often also in their online shops. These kinds of activities are becoming more and more popular among rural women.

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"when my children were born I started to think of what I can do when they go to kindergarten and school. I knew that I do not want to go back to my workplace in the city, I do not want to travel so much every day and I want to be with my children every evening and afternoon. But I also knew that I do not want to be only a housewife, I need to do something creative. I studied marketing at university so I decided to try to find something I can sell via the Internet. Here in this region the pumpkin oil is a traditional local product, and we have arable land where we (my husband and my father in law) grow pumpkins. So I decided I would do something with pumpkin. We bought a pumpkin oil machine and started to produce pumpkin oil in a traditional and also in a new alternative way. Now we mostly produce 100% virgin pumpkin oil as the main product with many other type of oils such as nut, poppy etc. I have opened a blog about oils, about which ones are good for health and why, and I also sell our products on my website." (interview with a creative woman entrepreneur from Zala County.

It is important to emphasise that local food producers especially women stated that they started to produce food for leisure reasons and later it developed into a business.

"*We have goats, and we had more and more milk, so at first I started to produce cheese for my family. I tried new recipes and then I went to the local market and sold them there, and then more and more people came here to buy my cheese, I have more than 10 types such as with garlic, with purple onion, with basil, cream cheese etc. now I have this small shop here at the house, and I can sell all my products… „*(interview with a cheese producer in the Bicske micro region).

Conclusions

Creative female enterpreneurs in rural heritage sector can be characterized according to both traditional and modern gender roles. They combine the role of a modern business woman with that of a traditional housewife and mother. Many aspects of late modernity and related hybridization can be identified through the life stories of women in rural food and tourism businesses. They are redefining their roles in a reflexive way characteristic of late modernity (Giddens 1991). In some of the studied regions, especially in Őrség and Bicske micro region, there are many newcomers among new food producing women who have moved to the rural settlements because of their family.

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