

## Description for the general public

The aim of the research project is an attempt to identify and explain whether and how the models of family relationships and gender roles in rural families change in the context of the socio-economical transformation of rural areas, and the broader transformation of the family after 1989 in Poland. In addition to the fundamental purpose, which is to identify the experiences of rural families from the perspective of autobiographical narratives of women about their gendered roles (mother, wife/partner), it is also important to answer the following 3 major questions.

Firstly, is the rural family still a traditional family, if we look at it through the lens of the histories (embedded in the autobiographies) of three decades of the post socialist transformation of the family roles of women, and the patterns of relationships, which they actively create? Can we rather observe the construction of patterns ascribed to the postmodern family configurations? Or perhaps, we can find hybrid patterns, in which what is traditional and related to the processes of the *longue durée* is combined, in a specific way, with what is new, related to the processes of postmodern individualization?

Secondly, what are the causes of the formation of specific patterns of relationships and gendered family role models? What constitutes the economic, socio-cultural conditions under which the specific patterns of relationships and family roles are reproduced and/or redefined?

Thirdly, what are the bottom-up constructed models and their dynamic changes characterized by? Are the concepts and theories used in the Polish sociology of the family, to a large extent transplanted from the international research, and therefore, from other, economic and socio-cultural contexts (in particular from the contexts of the urban and metropolitan family), sufficient to describe and explain the transformation of the rural family, which is immersed in the locality, and specific to Polish conditions? Can the interpretations of family problems and strategies, found in the redefinitions of the roles of wives/partners and mothers made by rural women, provide a genuine perspective on the studies of the family, gender, but also the feminist thought? Especially in the situation when those studies have shown marginal interest in rural women and families created by them, too hastily unifying their image as bastions of conservatism.

Therefore, the exploration of the transformation of the rural family will require an interdisciplinary approach. The project will be embedded in the areas of anthropology and sociology of the family, rural sociology and anthropology, globalization and social change studies in the Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the sociology of gender. The applied innovative methodological approach – an combination of dynamic, biographical interpretive approaches, using the techniques of long-term field observations and discourse analysis – was developed by the author in earlier studies (changes in the family roles in the migration of rural women, including women from the working class, Urbańska 2015).

Autobiographies of about 30 women from diverse family configurations (e.g. married couples with children, without children, single mothers) will be examined. The study will deliberately encompass chosen villages in the Podlaskie Voivodship. The intentional choice of Podlasie is dictated by theoretical assumptions. As the aim of the project is to investigate whether since 1989 we have been dealing with the transformation of the traditional family, it seems justified to choose an agricultural region which is somewhat isolated from the other voivodships, owing to a poor transport infrastructure, as well as characterised as traditional in terms of opinions and values shared by its residents. The region of Podlasie can be treated as a kind of laboratory of the transformation of the traditional rural family, which has been subjected to strong influences for several decades.

Choosing the research topic is crucial due to a lack of analyses of the experience of living in a rural family, despite the fact that approximately 38% of the population lives in rural areas, and the majority of Poles have rural roots. Filling this gap is therefore essential for the exploratory, theoretical, methodological reasons, and also for those related to a social practice:

1. I plan to fill the gap in social studies, primarily in the areas of sociology of the family and gender studies.

2. To go beyond the stereotypical monolithic conservative image about rural families present in the media and scientific reports. Few modern studies of roles and life experience in the rural family show changes, which question what we understand as traditional vs. postmodern systems of relationships in families. It will be important to include these dispersed, theoretical and empirical research discoveries into systematic research. From a theoretical and analytical point of view it would be interesting to examine rural families from a perspective of women as a space in which the traditional meets the postmodern

3. To apply an innovative, interdisciplinary methodology. What is lacking are the approaches which would enable one to link the meticulous microstructural perspectives (autobiographical story of transformation of family roles) with the processes that are happening outside the household and the village.