

## *Summary*

### **The Union of Silesian Rural Women / *Verein Schlesischer Landfrauen* Culture animator in Upper Silesia**

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The Union of Silesian Rural Women / *Verein Schlesischer Landfrauen* (still: USRW), as the women's minority organisation, was established on 18th March in 1994 in Wierzech (Głogówek community) by Urszula Trinczek. Currently, it is consisted of about one thousand members from Upper Silesia. The important part of its activity is to organise the cultural life of German minority, especially Silesian women living on the countryside. The main purposes of my theoretical and empirical studies in the field of culture and religion are to discuss the culture-forming women's activities as well as the condition of the mentioned organization (USRW).

In order to maintain the research assumption and answer the detailed questions, it was necessary to concentrate on multifaceted functioning of the Union. That is why, In years 2014-2020, I was conducting the empirical studies in the whole area of this organization. I focused on Upper Silesia exploration, to be precise, in the central-eastern part (these days - it's a part of Opolskie Voivodeship) which is at the same time, the place of home town for native German people. Researches were held in the fourteen cities in Opolskie Voivodeship and two of Silesia community. Their ethnical structures haven't been changed since World War II.

Chapter One is titled „German minority in Poland (introductory notes) and study methodology”. It is a presentation of social-historical and political background functioning in Poland, mainly in Opole Silesia and the German minority. Moreover, Chapter One also includes various aims and forms of cultural participation in the Union Silesian Rural Women. The functioning of this feminine organization seems to be a complex issue because of German and Social and Cultural Society of the Germans activity in Opole Silesia (SCSG). I started my researches from two queries: archival and library. Then, I led a pilot reconnaissance in order to learn more about the organization. Therefore, I analyzed found and evoked resources systematically (for example: my own gained materials in the form of photographic documentation). The main used qualitative techniques were different interviews (free, guided,

autobiographical, individual and group interviews with people at different ages). What is more, I have used the participant observation (open and hidden) and elements of the comparative method as well as the biographical method. Another source essential for my study was the information that came from the website [www.kobietysilesia.pl](http://www.kobietysilesia.pl), where I have found the women's self-creation as a part of virtual ethnography.

I became interested in the genesis, organization structures and purposes of the Union of Silesian Rural Women / *Verein Schlesischer Landfrauen* activities. In the centre of my attention, there were such things as: the reasons of the organization establishment, the current influences, its size, members' forms of activity. I also analyzed the ideological values, the various cultural activities and the role of USRW in the field of the cultural animation in Upper Silesia. I tried to assess such social-cultural activities from different perspectives: organizers – members and leaders, participants, the German minority government, representatives of the state and local administration in Opolskie Voivodeship.

In Chapter Two, I paid attention to the analysis of different ways of promoting the Silesian cultural heritage as well as various forms of celebrations (customs, annual rites, anniversaries, fairs and picnics). I also focused on all of these phenomena which we can perceive as „traditional inventions” and that can be organised within the Union of Silesian Rural Women. Such traditions that can take a shape of culture-forming, integrative and local inventions, for example: *Żurowa Środa* performance, the Exhibition of the Easter Tables, the Fair of Home Autumn Flavours and *Bania Fest*. During those events, people popularize daily, Lenten and holidays' regional food traditions. In Chapter Two, I present typical food preferences for the examined local community treating it as an example of the group axiology, an element that shapes the identity and an element that models the self-consciousness.

I have also paid attention to another members' activity of the Union Silesian Rural Women, namely, revitalization of Opole's costumes. I associated it as a complex culture text which requires some comments in the sights of diachronic and synchronous. Here, I show the genesis of the women's interest in the field of regional costumes within members of the Union of Silesian Rural Women. I also present the references to Upper-Silesian and Bavarian folk outfit in the modern stylisations. The conclusions coming from the complex ethnic and national identity analysis of different ways of the „canonical model” costume's reconstructions point out that people somehow model themselves on historical costumes. However, they are more free in their stylisations (for example: different materials, the machine embroidery application, simplification or a change of cut, an age mismatch). Taking the modern Union members' costume as an element of their self-creation into account, it is

necessary to point at the reconstruction of the traditional folk costume in the examined area and the domination of the ludic and aesthetic function. This outfit turns out to be a brand mark, exhibited as a „Silesian” ethno-card, ethno-gadget and a prop used for the aware „heritage game”.

Moreover, various activity forms might be very interesting, they can be seen as a sentimental-nostalgic „return to the past” when the initiation of Chamber of Tradition in Walce (*alte sztaba*) comes to my mind. That initiation is nothing more than establishing the collective memory space, exposing the sense of separateness of cultural-ethnic of affiliated members. Cultural ventures organized within local circles, such as: *szkubki*, *babski comber* as well as putting the May tree, locally named as *maibaum*, their aims to cultivate the native cultural heritage. Although modern culture-forming initiatives link with Silesian, Polish and German traditions, they slightly base on ethnical and national sources of heritage culture. Thanks to many modifications, we may add them to the performances composed of some chosen „crumbs of the past”.

The essential issue of the Union of Silesian Rural Women is the fact that women exchange their experience with the German organization – *Deutscher Landfrauen Verband*. We may perceive the phenomenon of Germanness fascination as well as the willingness to imitate goals.

The discussed union leaders’ biographies, women-passionates, culture heritage depositaries, Silesian and German culture animators prove that the examined women impress their activities when they act as local culture animators, they concentrate on social work and charities. They are creative and enterprising, they are able to link the work for local society with their housework and family life. Basically, they can choose between a tradition and modernity.

I have also concentrated on, leaders’ activities as part of activities of the Rural Housewives’ Association as well as the „Renewal of the Opole Village” program, in the context of modern social projects on the countryside (Chapter Seven). Its aims are to revitalize rural areas and activate local communities. Although, in the study area, there is the Rural Housewives’ Association, local women choose the alternative form – the Union of Silesian Rural Women, it happens to emphasize their ethnical and national identity.

Conducting the theoretical and empirical studies allowed the analysis and interpretation of various culture-forming actions that are taken by women within the Union. It enabled me to realize the set goals as well as to formulate the final conclusions, namely, to define the importance of the organization from Upper Silesia. We may conclude that women

who are the members of the Union, they are also animators of various social-cultural initiatives which are the forms of celebrations and empowerments of the community. Within the Union, they focus on contemporary problems, dilemmas, identity choices typical for people who live on the geographical, historical, political, cultural and awareness borders. Women who are the members of the organization usually identify themselves either with German, choosing some German cultural elements, or Silesian. Moreover, women that joined to the Union have a very strong awareness of Silesian culinary traditions and their transformations. Food traditions play an important role to keep and develop the ethnical awareness either among Silesian people or national identity for local Germans. Culinary traditions, within the Union activities, apart from social and integrative functions, they play also different roles such as: decorative, aesthetic and representative. Many meals have their symbols – they are the identity signs. Women from the organization promote the area they come from, they become to be both German and Silesian „ambassadors”.

The main idea of the organization is the attention that should be paid to women, the traditional shape of culture. Moreover, it is also important to construct the process of social-cultural transformations around this dimension in the local communities. It is possible to maintain that ideas of culture-forming within the Union of Silesian Rural Women, on the one hand, are the German minority community emancipation, officially absent till 1990s XX century, on the other hand, they are the ways of showing the diversities of developer women's creativity as well as their active participation in the modern culture.