



JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
IN KRAKÓW

Women's Advocacy for River Protection in Poland

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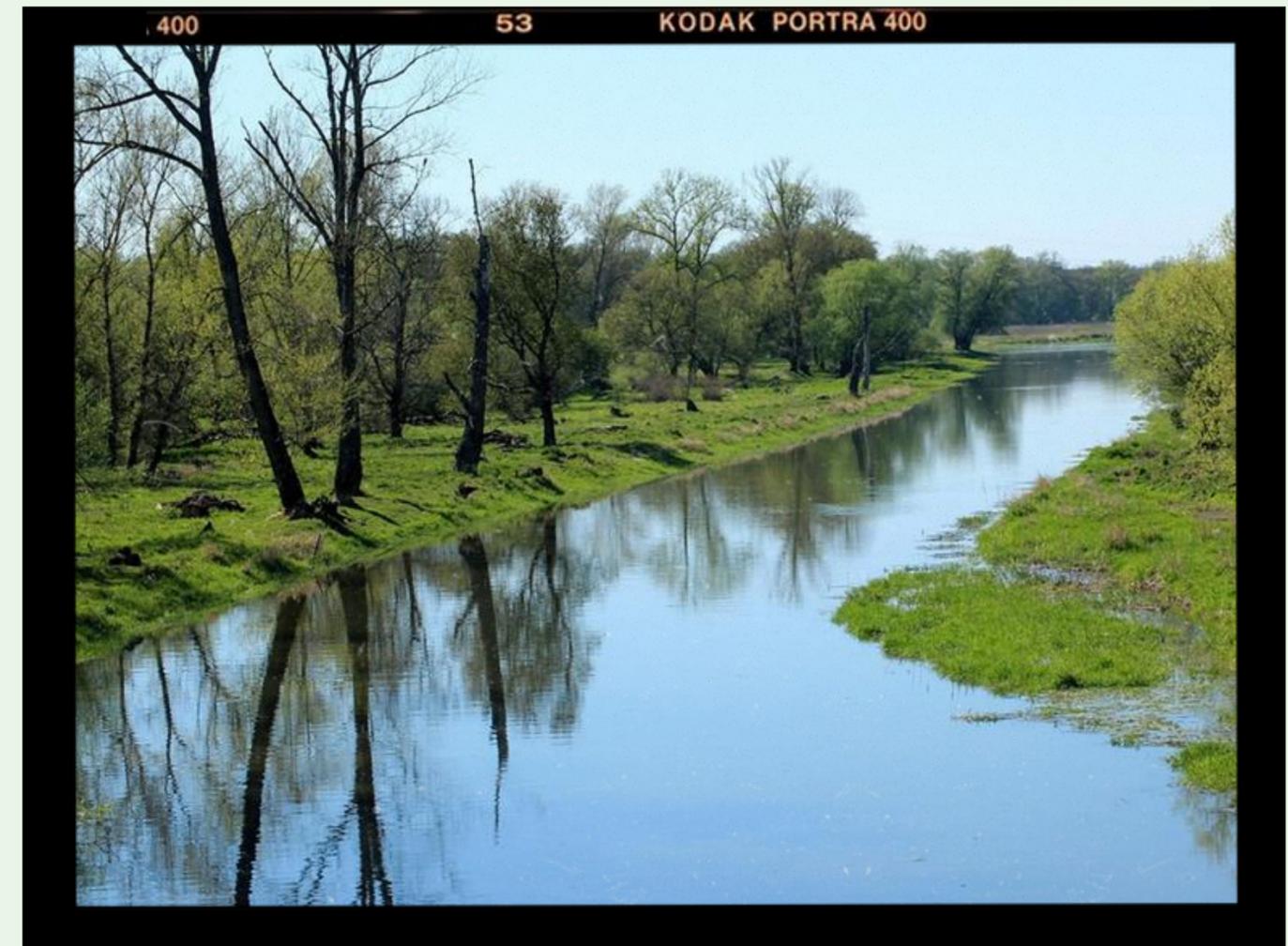
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RSA Porto, 2025

SS13: Exploring Gender Equality in Policy: Regional and Rural Perspectives

INTRODUCTION

- Vital ecosystems like rivers face grave threats in Poland from industry, urbanization and governance prioritizing profit over environmental protection
- Gender mainstreaming remains limited in Polish environmental and spatial policies at all levels: national, regional, local
- Grassroots activities are often unrecognized in formal decision-making processes
- Addressing gender dimensions seems vital for sustainable regional development



CASE STUDIES: SISTERS RIVERS IN MYSCOWA VILLAGE

The Sister Rivers collective made up of female activists is aimed at protecting and rewilding rivers across Poland. While they are more visible in major cities, their work also extends to peripheral and rural areas, such as the village of Myscowa in the Low Beskids. They organized happenings to protest the planned Kały-Myscowa dam threatening rural communities and ecosystems.

Key Activities:

- Artistic performances
- Discussions with local residents and authorities about environmental and social impacts
- Empowering local women to voice concerns about displacement and loss of livelihoods



Source: Local Press Materials

CASE STUDIES: MARCH FOR THE ODER RIVER

The Oder Tribe is a group of activists who organized the March for the Oder River in response to the ecological disaster of 2022.

The march symbolized a collective act of care and aimed to raise public awareness about the initiative to grant the river legal personhood.

Women led and coordinated many stages of the march, sharing stories about the river.

Many of them came from rural and small-town communities, embodying values of care and responsibility toward the environment.

Women from diverse groups joined the March, including mothers and older women from the University of the Third Age.



Source: Local Press Materials

WHY WOMEN?

- Important roles in local communities:
local stewardship, especially growing recently
in rural areas of Poland
- Experience of exclusion
- Underrepresentation in formal
decision-making bodies at the national and regional levels
- Concerns about nature, ethics of care
- Reaction to governmental neglect
and environmental degradation
- Motivation to preserve rivers for future generations
- Building sisterhood and empowering women
- Networking

“When it comes to our bodies, both rivers and women have often been controlled and regulated, and we wanted to oppose that. We were simply wild, beautiful, unregulated.”

The representative of the Sisters Rivers group

IMPACT AND CHALLENGES

Positive effects:

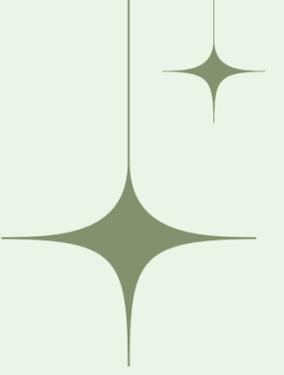
- growing awareness at local and national levels
- increased media visibility
- slowing down projects harmful for rivers
- strengthening local community
- challenging patriarchal systems
- launching new projects (monitoring water quality in rivers, collecting signatures for granting legal personhood to the river)
- redefining rivers as vital ecosystems, not resources

Challenges:

- marginalization in formal processes
- discrimination and lack of recognition
- self-doubt
- burnout
- lack of institutional support

POLICY DIMENSIONS

- Gendered perspectives are largely excluded from environmental and spatial policymaking
- National and regional policies lack a systematic approach to linking environmental planning with gender equality
- In regional policies (e.g., provincial strategies), references to gender equality are rare and usually appear in the context of the labor market, rather than environmental or spatial issues
- There is an urgent need for:
 - Gender-sensitive environmental planning
 - Recognition and support of women's local stewardship
 - Inclusive consultations and support for grassroots activities



SUMMARY

- Women's activism is vital for sustainable and just environmental future in rural areas
- Systemic policies in Poland do not respond to women's needs, which is why they use alternative, grassroots paths of action
- Gender equality should be integrated into environmental and spatial policymaking
- Empowering local women is crucial for achieving equitable environmental governance



Source: Local Press Materials



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