

## **Rural Tourism: A Gender Approach**

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Thematic area: Women and Gender

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6<sup>th</sup> World Leisure Congress

Leisure and Human Development

Bilbao, 3-7 July 2000

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### **Abstract**

Research on the subject of rural tourism and agritourism in the Netherlands has shown that most of the work in this field is done by women. Moreover, without the consent and initiative of the women, no agritourist activities would have been started. In the paper the position of women in agritourist enterprises is understood within the framework of family enterprises. Findings of research are presented on the position of women in tourism enterprises, of which agritourist enterprises are specific examples. The women's position in the enterprise and in the branch organisation are discussed with help of the power relation theory (Giddens, 1981; Komter, 1985), and the 'tokenism' theory of Kanter (1977). The findings indicate that the challenge of the renewal of the countryside, plays a major role in the independency and control rural women face when setting up an own enterprise related to the farm.

## **Rural Tourism: A Gender Approach**

The Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries postulates that women play an important role in agritourism while resolving conflicts between different functions of the countryside. The ministry says that future policy should focus on three goals:

1. integration of women in decision-making and consultative bodies;
2. realisation of economic independency of women; and
3. the increase of women's influence on use, design, and management of the countryside

(Nota Emancipatiebeleid-LNV tot 2000).

The ministry faces what seems to be a general phenomenon: women are focused on part-time jobs in 'women's' sectors on the labour market, and in the lower echelons of the hierarchy, partly due to business cultures (Hooghiemstra & Niphuis-Nell, 1993).

Te Kloeze and Peters (1998) have already reached the conclusion that women play a significant role in innovative activities in rural areas. Research entitled 'Agrarian women modernise the countryside' undertaken by the Dutch Society of Countrywomen and the Western Agricultural and Horticultural Organisation's 'Agrarian women and farm development' has revealed that agrarian women play an active role in the search for new economic challenges on rural areas. A joint article from the Netherlands Institute for Care and Welfare (NIZW) and the Agricultural Information and Knowledge Centre indicates that agrarian women could play a role in the improvement of rural life. It also includes the theme: 'making use of the potential of agrarian women'.

It appears that agrarian women are more open to change than men and pay attention to the social aspects of living conditions in rural areas. Social entrepreneurship aims at innovative opportunities and the promotion of the economic independence of women.

The significant role played by women in the organisation of new business in the rural sphere does not only apply to the Netherlands. In all of Europe women seem to have a stimulating influence on rural innovation. Research on women in rural areas reveals that they have a key function in the vitality of the rural community. Besides their economic activity, they contribute significantly to the quality of life of their family and the living conditions of their village (Braithwaite, 1994).

This paper investigates the role of Dutch women in rural tourism enterprises as (joint-)owners of these enterprises. It focuses on tourism supply and on the position of owners, and not on the demand and on the position of employees. I will create a framework which facilitates the understanding of relevant aspects of their position in terms of a gender approach, addressing the participation of women in the tourist sector: their position, how much control they have over their position and their enterprise, taking initiatives, task-sharing, decision-making, and the aspect of contribution to the renewal of the countryside. The emphasis is on the position of woman entrepreneurs in rural tourism and agritourism in the Netherlands. Apart from the specific context of the family enterprise, some examples from literature are presented on women in rural tourism in Europe (mainly Greece and Spain) while the theoretical approach has been derived from some notions about power relations (in families) (Giddens, 1981; Komter, 1985), and from Kanter's idea of 'tokenism'.

### **The position of women in family enterprises**

Because the paper deals with the position of women in rural and agrarian recreation

enterprises in the Netherlands, I will present findings of research conducted among women working in mixed enterprises (agriculture and recreation and tourism; rural tourist enterprises; and agritourist enterprises).

Many recreation enterprises in the Netherlands are family enterprises like farms and small and medium-sized enterprises. A family enterprise is one in which the production means and the labour supply are combined in one household. Kinship contributes to the social relationships in the enterprise (Hobbelink and Spijkers, 1986). In the past, farmer's wives were invisible. One spoke about a one-man enterprise whereas statistics showed one and a half labour force. According to Loeffen (1984) a farmer's wife spent 22 hours a week working on the farm, implying that she usually worked longer hours than her husband (22 hours plus all the household chores and the upbringing of the children). Two-thirds of farmer's wives set household chores aside when there is work to be done in the enterprise. Another problem concerns the invisibility of her work on the farm. She is wife and mother as well as business employee and her husband's professional partner. Spatial vicinity of living and working strengthens the interweaving of enterprise and household. The paperwork for the enterprise is often done in the domestic sphere (Zwart, 1990). Research among women in small and medium-sized enterprises report comparable findings (Meijer *et al.*, 1984). De Rooij (1992) concludes there is a delineation of task-sharing between the farmer and the farmer's wife on (dairy) farms. The farmer's wife does not do the milking, feeding of the cows, mowing, selling cheese on a market stall, interpreting financial data, all duties which need responsibility, professional knowledge, insight into and overview of the production process. The typical described women's duties are: the cleaning of the milk equipment, the feeding of calves, tending the hay, cheese making, and the financial paperwork; all duties easily combined with household chores, easy to learn, familiar tasks that women have grown up with, those physically not too taxing, and which the farmer/husband does not like. The legitimation of this task-sharing is found in complementarity of her husband's work in the enterprise and her 'own' work in the household. This legitimation is established in a deep feeling of casualness based on gender stereotyping.

### **Some theoretical notions about women in enterprises**

There is an awareness that biological differences between women and men are used as justification for femininity and masculinity which are culturally ascribed characteristics. The stereotype image of women and the division of labour connected with it (women working in the household, men doing paid work outside the home) and the division of resources places

constraints on the emancipation of women (Aalten, 1991). Men live within certain societal structures which restrict their actions. But people are active actors capable of reshaping rules, values, and structures, the extent to which they do so is dependent on their power. Power is both constraining and enabling to actors, it is relational, and not necessarily intentional (Giddens, 1981). Power could be manifest, latent, or invisible (Komter, 1985). In gender relations power has the character of this invisibility: it is taken for granted. On the one hand, women's labour in family enterprises could be labelled and perceived as 'invisible' or as 'second class work' (De Rooij, 1992). On the other hand, women, as knowledgeable beings, are able to slowly conquer their positions by demystifying the obviousness of the power division. Women do so by applying different strategies:

- \* by rejecting femininity;
- \* by giving a female interpretation to male tasks; and
- \* by broadening the concepts of femininity and masculinity.

Female entrepreneurs usually embrace the second strategy (Aalten, 1991).

There is inequality in power relations within the family as well as on the labour market and in organisations, and in managements. Kanter (1977) uses the idea of 'tokenism' to explain the persistence of the segregation between 'women's' and 'men's' professions. She speaks about 'skewed' groups, which are those in which there is a large preponderance of one type over another ('dominants' over 'tokens': the few of another type in a skewed group). The proportional rarity of tokens is associated with three perceptual tendencies: visibility, contrast, and assimilation (*ibid.*: 210). What is valid for the labour market seems to be true for management situations also: women face 'tokenism', they are not supposed to be too feminine, neither too masculine (which is actually an example of assimilation). The solution would appear to be the second strategy just mentioned (Aalten, 1991) - a feminine interpretation of masculine tasks, which is in line with assimilation. The question is how valid is this theory for women in rural tourist enterprises.

### **Women in the tourism sector**

Several studies indicate that relatively few women hold responsible positions in the tourist sector (Schreier, 1991; Kleijwegt, 1994). Gender differences were noted in hiring practices: typically, men were appointed to manage larger, better-funded organisations (81% men, 19% women), while women were appointed as either managers of tourist information centres (35% men, 65% women) or to assist managerial positions in large organisations (19% men, 81% women) (McKercher and Ritchie, 1997). Ireland (1993) studied families in which the

women in the family take care of the provision of bed-and-breakfast services. In a village in Cornwall (United Kingdom) the occurrence of economic resources could be combined: the land and seascape, the homes of local people to accommodate the visitor, and most importantly, the labour force of the women with the required skills. Men themselves were to become a tourist attraction as markers of a fishing industry, which the visitor found harsh yet romantic. In reality, men were and continue to be the victims of structural unemployment. Ireland used anthropological research to identify historical documents with regard to the role of women's employment. Ethnographic research has enabled the identification of families whose women members had begun to take on the role of provider of hospitality for the better class of visitor to supplement the family income. Of the two studies mentioned the first reported on the position and participation on the labour market of women in the tourist sector, while the latter was focused on role patterns. Precise information about control, task-sharing, and decision-making has not been provided.

Kinnaird and Hall (1996) argued that: (1) tourism development processes and tourism-related activities are constructed out of gendered societies; (2) gender relations both inform, and are informed by the practices of all societies; and (3) power relations surrounding tourism development processes represent an extension of the politics of gender relations. They concluded that an analysis of tourism-related activity can be enhanced by focusing on the dynamics of gender relations. Their analysis revealed that access to tourism-related employment is overtly gender-based. In addition, they argue that gender relations and roles are an important element of authenticity and tradition and change in response to the demands of tourism development processes (for instance: the production by women of ethnic handicrafts (Swain, 1993)). Changing gender relations are also expressed in the way in which tourism interacts with families. In Crete, Kousis (1989) found that thanks to mass tourism, change in rural family structure reflected a more widespread control of decision making among family members and the potential of increased autonomy for women. The involvement of women in new tourism enterprises in Ireland is accepted in a society where, historically, women's work has been stringently controlled. The view of a woman as wife, mother and the carer for others has remained dominant in Irish society. Consequently, the extension of this role into providing lodgings for tourists is acceptable and does not challenge the prevailing notions of gender roles and relationship (Breathnach *et al.*, 1994).

### **Women in the Dutch tourism sector**

Focusing on the position of women in the Dutch tourism sector I present a comparison with

the total labour force in the Netherlands which shows that employment in the tourist sector is occupied largely by women; see Table 1.

Table 1 Average employment in the tourist recreative sector in the Netherlands by gender and by weekly working hours and percentages, 1991-1993

	Men	Women	Men over 20	Men under 20	Women over 20	Women under 20
The Netherlands, total	62	38	92	8	70	30
Tourism and recreation, total, all groups	59	41	85	15	66	34
idem, transport excluded	48	52	79	21	61	39
Travel organisations	28	72	97	3	90	10
Accommodation	49	51	87	13	70	30
Catering	51	49	77	23	63	37
Culture, recreation, amusement	47	53	75	25	51	50
Transport	80	20	94	6	82	18

*Source:* Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 1995

Women are overrepresented in the part-time labour force (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 1995). At the onset of their careers men and women are equal but only a few reach the top. As soon as children arise they prefer to work less which would not be a problem if persons in leading positions were permitted to work part-time. But this is not true. The legitimization for leading positions not to be part-time is found in the following. It is because:

- \* of perceived coordination and communication problems;
- \* it threatens the continuation of the work;
- \* it does not fit in with the culture of the organisation; and
- \* it is unclear for the customer.

Moreover, child-rearing is not common in tourist recreative enterprises, neither is positive gender discrimination (Kleijwegt, 1994).

Van Dijk (1994) conducted a study among working women in recreation enterprises (all members of RECRON, the Dutch organisation for recreation entrepreneurs), most of them former farms (*ibid.*: 38). The response was 66% (262 out of 398 enterprises). Nearly half of the women (49%) worked on a campsite and a third in a mixed enterprise (campsite + bungalow park; camping + group accommodation), most of the enterprises being small (less than 210 camping sites). Two-thirds worked 36 hours or more, 19% 20 hours or less, and 14% between 21 and 35 hours per week. Of the women in the recreation enterprise 91% was proprietress or joint proprietress. Table 2 provides information about the task-sharing between man and woman (husband and wife) at the enterprise.

Table 2 Task-sharing in recreation enterprises in the Netherlands; n = 262; percentages

	Woman (wife)	man (husband)
Paperwork	85	52
Management	73	86
Catering	47	46
Maintenance	43	88
Personnel	46	43
Reception	82	50
Shop	19	12
Cleaning	Some	?
Recreation work	Some	?

Source: Van Dijk, 1994

Task-sharing in recreation enterprises in the Netherlands is largely determined by gender. A combination of working in the enterprise and the housekeeping and the upbringing of the children was mainly a question of good improvisation and organisation. At peak times they felt they failed in their duty towards their children which led to feelings of guilt towards the children and towards the surrounding world. A respondent said:

*"It just means managing to do everything by pulling out all the stops. You have to be able to organise well. The working days are long, to make many hours and to keep pulling the strings".*

Another one responded by saying:

*"The housekeeping is not important, that continues anyway. You can't earn anything by it. It is the enterprise is what it's all about".*

The daily duties of women in the recreation enterprise vary because enterprise, family and household are interwoven. The dominant traditional division of roles between men and women in society results in the main part of the housekeeping falling on the woman's shoulder. It is taken for granted that the woman takes care of the housekeeping and the upbringing of the children. This is why the woman (wife) is more tied to the enterprise and home than the man (husband) (*ibid.*: 45).

Besides an analysis of the women's position in recreation enterprises the study also provides information about her position in RECRON (the branch organisation). The executive committee of RECRON consists of two women and nine men. There are 146 district committee members, among which 17 are women (12%). Both cases reveal a strong underrepresentation has been found. The women are ambiguous about their participation in the committee. Eighty per cent said more women should be on RECRON committees, while more than 90% indicated that they did not intend becoming committee members. The findings of the open interviews held revealed that RECRON women think it important that more women should become committee members. One woman said:

*"First, because the women are capable enough. Second, women think differently. Men are more interested in the technical aspects of the enterprise, while women stress more personal things (e.g. contact with guests). Third, as society consists of women and men, it is obvious this should be reflected in our committees. Moreover, women have a lot of experience because they co-operate actively in the enterprise".*

The study also indicates the women's participation in committees quantitatively and in more detail, see Table 3.

Table 3 The extent of women's involvement in RECRON; 'yes' answer; n = 262; percentages

Attended RECRON district meetings (past 5 years)	44
More women have to attend RECRON district meetings	80
More women should be included in RECRON committees	80
Being active in RECRON	8
Intended to be active in RECRON	7

Source: Van Dijk, 1994

The women's opinion was also investigated quantitatively, see Table 4.

Table 4 Women's opinion about being active in RECRON (RECRON members); '(fully) agree' answers; n = 262; percentages

Women should be as active as men in RECRON	94
RECRON is a typical men's bastion	31
It is virtually impossible for women to get a position in RECRON	14
RECRON has little time for women's problems in recreation enterprises	32
It is the women's fault that they are hardly active in RECRON	85
Women have the same opportunity as men to be active in RECRON	80
The home front is the reason why women are hardly active in RECRON	34

Source: Van Dijk, 1994

The conclusion is that RECRON women actually blame themselves for their lack of involvement in RECRON.

## **Gender relations and rural tourism and agritourism in Europe: the case of Greece and Spain**

In Greece the Secretariat for Equality of the Ministry of Presidency decided on exclusive promotion of women's agritourist cooperatives. In 1993 eight cooperatives dotted around the rural country were functional, e.g. in Arachova in Central Greece and Agios Germanos in Prespes of Macedonia (Iakovidou and Kazana, 1993). The best known activities of the women's agritourist cooperatives included:

1. provision of tourists lodgings with or without bed and breakfast;
2. provision of traditional meals; and
3. preparation and provision of local agricultural products such as home-made traditional food and handicrafts.

The case of the Agritourist Women's Cooperative of Petra (the first one in Greece) was analysed by Iakovidou and Kazana (1993), Giagou (1993) and Turner (1993). The most obvious changes were:

1. increase of income affecting both the community and the individual households;
2. return of the young people to the village and their involvement in agricultural activities as well as in tourist enterprises;
3. alienation of local people as a result of their competition and pursuit of profit;
4. expansion of the village to more built-up areas; and
5. decrease of desire for higher education among the youth because most of them had been working on their parents' farm from an early age.

Zarkia (1992) described the transformation process, the hosts' reactions and repercussions of tourism (not rural tourism, but mass tourism) on the island of Skyros:

1. upset in social stratification provoked by the rising value of land;
2. institutional crisis affecting the dowry system and marital strategies;
3. influence in evaluation of the local identity and culture provoked by the contact of 'two worlds'; and
4. changes in behaviour and social relationships.

While positively commenting on the coming of these agro-tourist co-operatives, Leontidou (1994: 98) added that "peasant women with economic independence were becoming so emancipated as to storm the *kafeneia*, the male-dominated coffee shops of Greek villages, and sometimes exclude men from them". So, the difference between the effects of mass tourism and rural tourism on local communities is striking.

Garcia-Ramon *et al.* (1995) made clear that the work of women is the key to the development of rural tourism. The tasks required are very similar to those traditionally performed in the home, that is, domestic work. Women view this work as an extension of their domestic work, equivalent to taking care of their 'extended' family. The authors comment that it is ironic that it is the traditional gender role which has largely enabled women to participate in rural tourism enterprises. On the one hand, this new enterprise reinforces the traditional separation of domestic and agricultural work by gender. On the other hand, women value the opportunity to interact with the outside world more than their husbands do.

## **Gender relations and rural tourism and agritourism in the Netherlands**

### ***Motives***

A decade ago research showed that 26.5% of farmers' families that had started to set up a campsite on the farm were motivated by the woman wanting to start with non-agrarian labour. As far as the families were concerned the financial motive was the most important (84.2%; Zonneveld, 1988).

### ***Taking initiatives***

Research conducted in the southwest part of the Province of Friesland and the central part of Noord-Brabant (Oostindie & Peters 1994) has revealed that the combination of agriculture and recreation is still limited in scope. Their typology of agrarian enterprises based on the perspectives for developing subsidiary activities in the recreational sector is as follows:

*Expansion:* The economic return on the recreational facilities is central to these farms. Besides the agrarian activities, the farmer is closely attuned to the development opportunities in the sectors of tourism and recreation. In many cases, the farmer takes time off from agricultural work to take care of the subsidiary activities in the recreational enterprise.

*Phasing out:* These establishments are often operated by an aging farmer with no one lined up to take over the enterprise. The farmer rents out storage space (mainly for recreational vehicles) in structures no longer in agricultural use, usually as a temporary activity to tide him over until the enterprise is terminated. This is why the farmer does not invest very much in recreational facilities.

*Provision:* The woman's role in these enterprises is essential, as she does most of the work.

Agricultural activities are the primary factor in running the farm as a whole. The willingness to invest is focused mainly on improving quality rather than on expansion.

In particular, it is those farmer's wives with work experience outside the agricultural sector and/or a non-agricultural background who start a sideline in recreation. The following fragment from an interview is characteristic of several of the women interviewed.

*"I always had a job outside agriculture, but this ceased when we came to live here. After we took over the farm I didn't just only want to work on the farm and do the household chores. I wanted to have a sideline. Because we have such an enormous house with six bedrooms upstairs, we began with bed and breakfast. That was easy to combine with the other tasks I already had".*

The importance of the role of the farmer's wife is clear in the division of labour in the recreational subsidiary business. She has the lion's share of all the tasks:

*"Most of the work is now done by my wife. She settles the accounts, cleans the toilets and showers etc. The toilets are closed in the mornings from 11.15 to 12.00. Everyone knows this and it runs smoothly. I mow the field once a week which takes about half a day. We have a container for the rubbish which is collected once a week during the summer, so that is hardly any bother to me at all".*

The labour input of the man on these farms is chiefly focused on renovation and installation tasks and the necessary maintenance. Those interviewed said that the presence of the recreational business barely affects the agricultural business, although the safety of operation does require some extra attention:

*"The mini-campsite is completely separate from the farm and has no influence on the farming activities. We have a suitable piece of land adjacent to the woods and not too near the farm. Naturally, care has to be taken with all those strangers on the farm. We once discovered in the nick of time that a couple of children had crept onto a measuring wagon. The reel was turning when the heads of the children popped up in the grass. It gave us quite a jolt. But, on the whole I think it is not too dangerous. The modern machinery are a good deal safer than they were in the past".*

The man's share of the necessary chores for the recreational sideline is evidently larger according to a smaller group of entrepreneurs. On a farm offering mooring places combined with a mini-campsite, the following comments were made:

*"All in all it takes up quite some time, which is not to be underestimated. There's more to it than people think. In the summer I make the rounds at 6.30 p.m. to collect the mooring charges and often do not return until dark. I'm busy all that time and am not just sitting down drinking coffee or whatever. My wife or daughter must then stay at home to take care of the guests at the campsite. The business needs backing of the entire family. Not only the farmer's wife but all the other members of the family too".*

The farm above therefore decided to stop the milk production. The fields are being prepared for the production of grass. A contract has been agreed upon with a neighbouring grass drying plant. On other farms the expansion of recreational subsidiary business is often combined with an expansion of agricultural activities.

The presence of subsidiary activities in tourism and recreation is less readily explained by the size of the farm or the intensity of land use than by the attitude of the farmer's wife (or woman farmer, as the case may be) (see also Zonneveld 1988; Te Kloeze 1990, 1996).

### **Task-sharing**

Several studies (Te Kloeze 1990; Ubaghs 1992) show that the daily management, the paperwork as well as the cleaning of the sanitary belong to the tasks of the women (sometimes in cooperation with their husbands). The man takes care of the maintenance (among other things the lawnmowing) and reparations. The type of task-sharing in the household between husband and wife is *reproduced* in the agritourist enterprise, see Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5 Task-sharing between husband/wife (farmer/farmer's wife) in agritourist enterprises (letting group accommodation) (The Netherlands, 1992) (percentages)

	Daily	Paperwork	Cleaning facilities	Cleaning accommodation	Maintenance/repairs
Woman only	31 42	41 53	29 37	30 39	1 1
Man only	12 15	20 26	5 7	5 6	52 68

_ + _ only	19 26	11 14	18 23	11 14	5 7
Other(s)	13 17	5 7	26 33	31 41	19 24
?	25 ..	23 ..	22 ..	23 ..	23 ..
Total %%	100 100	100 100	100 100	100 100	100 100
N =	130 98	130 100	130 101	130 100	130 100

Source: Ubaghs (1992), quoted in Te Kloeze (1997)

Table 6 Task-sharing between husband/wife (farmer/famer's wife) in agritourist enterprises (letting rooms) (The Netherlands, 1992) (percentages)

	Daily	Paperwork	Cleaning facilities	Cleaning accommodation	Maintenance/repairs
Woman only	35 55	44 71	44 71	47 76	5 7
Man only	3 5	17 27	2 2	-- --	41 66
_ + _ only	24 38	1 2	9 15	5 7	5 7
Other(s)	2 2	-- --	7 12	9 14	11 29
?	36 ..	38 ..	38 ..	38 ..	38 ..
Total %%	100 100	100 100	100 100	100 100	100 100
N =	66 42	66 41	66 41	66 41	66 41

Source: Ubaghs (1992), quoted in Te Kloeze (1997)

### **Renewal, control and decision-making**

A study amongst 100 agrarian women (Hendriksen & Klaver, 1995) indicated that more and more agrarian women apply themselves to the making and selling of products, or to developing servicing activities. In some cases the farm delivers the basic products (eggs for advocaat-making, milk for cheese-making), in others, there is the room appropriate for developing activities (a meadow for a campsite at the farm, a part of the barn for a shop to sell home-made products). The main reason to start new initiatives is because it is fun, it is exciting (52%). The second important reason is the financial one, for instance to help the enterprise to survive a difficult financial period or to make the enterprise fit for succession (45%). Open interviews were held with 12 of these 100 agrarian women. Seven of the 12

took the initiative to start an activity more or less related to agritourism: marketing farm products or selling on the farm (cheese, advocaat, goat-milk and cheese), producing and selling regional products, camping at the farm (two cases). Two other initiatives concern: exploiting a dance studio, and letting rowing boats and canoes. A brief content analysis of these seven cases indicate that in five of the seven it was the woman who took the initiative; in the other two it was the husband's or the son's idea. All the cases are perfect examples of rural renewal: the invention, the making, the promoting, and selling of new (farm) products. One example bears resemblances to the women's agritourist co-operatives in Greece: the 'Compagniest Banket' in the Province of Groningen. Eight farmer's wives established a co-operative under taking the organising of rural banquets: 10 courses offered on 10 different farmsteads in the north of the Netherlands. One farmer's wife who took the initiative said:

*"Many farmers find it hard to survive financially. I noticed people were losing their self-esteem, so I organised an evening to talk about the theme: 'how do I keep my self-esteem while things are getting worse at the enterprise'. Then we had a brainstorm. I believed that we could use our capital goods and our buildings more adequately. So, I got the idea of turning our parlours into dining rooms where guests could dine in a very elegant way. This was the very start of the 'Compagniest Banket'".*

Content analysis of the seven cases shows that the women involved have control over their enterprise (although only a part of the farm) in terms of a say about the running of the enterprise and the time spent to keep the enterprise running (*My enterprise comes first, then the/his farm*"), and decision-making, including separate bookkeeping in some cases.

### **Conclusions and discussion**

Research on the subject of rural tourism and agritourism in the Netherlands has shown that most of the work in this field is done by women. Without the consent of the women, no agritourist activities would have been started, the consequence being a change in the role of the woman in a household. With several new tasks and being very busy especially in the tourist season, the changes in her role can have a great influence on the structure of the family. In this way, women live their own lives and earn their 'own' money which improves their economical situation (which does not necessarily mean that their social status will improve automatically). With room for their self-confidence women to grow some conflicts

could arise between them and the rest of the family. Getting involved in rural tourism enterprise can mean the socio-economic status of farmer's wives increases while that of their husbands decreases.

The task-sharing between husband and wife in their own tourism enterprises and in agritourist enterprises in the Netherlands is virtually the same, namely highly gendered, and a reproduction of the task-sharing in the traditional household. The resemblance to the Spanish case is striking. The strategy to conquer the position of these women seems to be 'assimilation'. The reality is that RECRON women experience that this is not at all as they suggest.

Where women (farmer's wives) are the initiators of new agritourist activities, contributing to the renewal of the countryside, they are apparently able to create a situation which provides them with independency, control and self-esteem. The question is which external factors enable rural women to create this position? The emancipation process in society appears to make rural women aware of their position, and challenges them to decide to go their own way (within the frame of the family enterprise, of course). Their strategy is related to Kanter's visibility tendency. They capture a larger awareness share. It could also be called the 'small is beautiful strategy' or the 'opportunity strategy' because these women are convinced they have to grasp the opportunities that come their way.

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