

The influence of culture and religion on the role of women in business – a case study of a Polish and Turkish automotive company

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Abstract

Despite a number of measures implemented by companies, the percentage of employed women still do not reach values close to those representing employment among men. This article's aim is to explore the relationship between the role and place of women in business and the culture and religion in a given society. The author focuses on Polish and Turkish cultures, and the differences between them. The study is based on the triangulation of reasoning methods using available literature sources, both books and articles, as well as statistical data showing mainly female employment or average wages. The empirical part is a comparative *case study* of two companies from Poland and Türkiye that are functioning in the automotive industry, and where women hold key positions. The research tool was a non-standardized in-depth interview. The study identifies culture as a factor that directly influences the place of women in organisations.

Keywords: gender equality, Poland, Türkiye, women, culture, automotive industry

Wpływ kultury i religii na rolę kobiet w biznesie – studium porównawcze przedsiębiorstwa polskiego i tureckiego z branży motoryzacyjnej

Streszczenie

Pomimo wielu działań przedsiębiorstw, liczby zatrudnionych kobiet wciąż nie osiągają wartości zbliżonych do tych reprezentujących zatrudnienie wśród mężczyzn. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu zbadanie zależności pomiędzy rolą i miejscem kobiety w biznesie a kulturą i religią obowiązującą w danym społeczeństwie. Autorka skupia się na dwóch kulturach narodowych – Polskiej i Tureckiej oraz różnicach między nimi. Badanie opiera się na metodach wnioskowania w których wykorzystano dostępne źródła literaturowe, zarówno książki i artykuły, jak i dane statystyczne pokazujące głównie

zatrudnienie kobiet czy średnie płace. Część empiryczna stanowi porównawcze studium przypadku dwóch firm z badanych krajów z branży motoryzacyjnej, w których kobiety zajmują kluczowe stanowiska. Narzędziem badawczym był niestandardyzowany wywiad pogłębiony. Jako czynnik bezpośrednio wpływający na miejsce kobiet w organizacji badanie określa kulturę.

Słowa kluczowe: równość płci, Polska, Turcja, kobiety, kultura, organizacja, branża motoryzacyjna

The situation of women and their rights is a topic currently widely discussed in many countries. In particular, the area of women's professional activity and their place in organisations is attracting a lot of attention, since even in Europe, which could boast the greatest equality between two genders, the situation, although not the worst, still indicates a predominance of men in business. These differences are mainly visible in the technical sectors and industry, but not only, generally there are more men than women in managerial positions (World Economic Forum 2022: p.7). In order to improve the current situation, it is first necessary to find the factors influencing it and to analyse them precisely. The situation of women in business can be influenced by many circumstances, ranging from the economic situation and government policies to the actual nature of the company, as well as conditions and opportunities that labour market provides for women. Focusing on what is inside a company, it can be seen that the nature and modus operandi of each of them differs significantly depending on its country of origin (Yo-Jud, Groysberg 2020).

The aim of the study is to explore the relationship between culture, including religion as its significant component, and the position that women take in business. The research is focused in particular on the automotive industry as an example of a fast-growing and prosperous industry sector. In order to conduct research in two culturally different environments, two countries with completely different national cultures were chosen: Poland as a representative of Christianity, and Türkiye as a country where the majority of the population follows Islam. In addition to diverse religions, the selected companies also represent different societies (European and non-European), making the value of the research not only local but also worldwide. The research includes an understanding of the basic concepts related to the essence of culture, an analysis of cultural and religious differences in Poland and Türkiye, necessary to understand the differences in the organisational cultures of the companies studied. This is followed by the place and role of women in the business context, the salary differences showing the gender gap, and the participation of women in organisations, especially in management positions now and in the past. The study was conducted in 2023 and was based on the latest data sets that were fully available and methodologically consistent at the time of data collection and analysis. The use of statistics from 2017–2022 reflects the necessary time lag associated with the validation, harmonization, and comparability of data from different sources. More recent statistics (e.g., from 2024) had not yet been fully published or standardised at the time of finalising the analyses, but this fact does not significantly affect the validity of the study's conclusions. The empirical part includes a comparative *case study* of two companies from different countries operating in the automotive industry (women hold key positions in these companies).

The article is divided into two main parts. The first, theoretical part, contains two paragraphs: one focused on the origins of culture, and the second devoted specifically to Polish and Turkish culture in the context of female employment in the automotive industry. The theoretical part forms the basis for the next, empirical part, which also contains two paragraphs. The first is a description of the companies selected for the study, and the second discusses the results of the research conducted. In both parts the content is preceded by methodological descriptions.

The application of the research methods was intended to verify the **hypothesis** that culture and religion have an impact on the place and role of women in business, since organisational culture is derived precisely from the beliefs, values and norms of a given society. Therefore, determining the relationship between women's business situation and culture fills a gap in the literature in the area studied.

Materials and methods

The research was based on reasoning methods, with a special emphasis on interpretivism, because different cultures (Polish and Turkish) of both nationalities and organisations under study were analysed, thus, the anthropology of organisations is touched to a large extent. To achieve the research goal, available literature sources, books, articles, other publications and statistical data mainly showing the female employment or average wages were used. Systematic literature review conducted during the research includes various monographs and scientific articles from scientific databases like *Web of Science* and EBSCO. Research phrases were based mainly on the keywords: women, culture, organisation, gender equality, automotive industry. Monographs of famous anthropologists such as Geert Hofstede or Wojciech Burszta were also used to explore the problem under study. The websites used in the study provided access to reports on gender differences in employment, mainly *Gender Equality Index* and *Global Gender Gap Reports* or the reports prepared by the Statistical Institutes of Poland and Türkiye. Analysed sources were available in Polish, English or Turkish. The sources' multilingualism increased the span of the researcher's comprehension, thus, increased the probability of finding additional knowledge. The review began with an analysis of the knowledge of culture, its definition and the most significant components in the context of national and organisational culture for full understanding of the issue before proceeding with the actual research.

The essence of culture

Since people are different because of backgrounds they came from, their thoughts and emotions are non-identical. Once encoded in the early childhood, a way of thinking is often very difficult to change and sometimes impossible, because it requires the rejection of previously assimilated truths in exchange for the assimilation of new ones. Therefore, the social environment in which a person grows up and later lives is to a large extent responsible for shaping him or her, e.g. the family, then school, friends, place of work and

residence (Hofstede G., Hofstede G.J. 2007: p. 16). This social formation corresponds to the concept known as culture. One of the first definitions of culture, recognised for the purposes of this study, says that taken in the broadest sense, it is entire complex containing knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, custom and all other capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor 1920). Culture as a social phenomenon, because shared by people living in a particular environment, separates one social group from another. It is important not to confuse the concept of culture with human nature. Whereas human nature is an undifferentiated, chaotic state, culture is an ordered set of norms or rules and can be understood. Moreover, nature includes everything that is in people from the biological side, whereas culture includes everything that occurs at a given time and in a given place, depending on a given society (Burszta 1998: p. 36).

A specific type of culture related to a social collective is national culture. The nation occupies a special place among social groups, because, clothed in the framework of the country, it is the most common platform for defining one's individual identity (Zendeowski, Koziński 2017: p. 15). National culture is defined as the collection of the personal cultures of all members of society. Knowledge of a nation's culture encompasses many aspects, such as language, religion, art, morals and law, customs and traditions. In addition to the factors mentioned above, national culture has another important function – it is the binder that connects all the individuals living in a country together. Social sciences assume that culture is all the activities performed every day and the difficulties that society faces. Therefore, although some national cultures may be more complex, others simpler, there is no society without culture (Bartosik-Purgat 2006: p. 15).

Looking deeper and considering smaller societies living as a part of the national culture, but at the same time belonging to other communities, another type of culture, which is organisational culture, can be distinguished. From the corporate practice point of view, it starts with the business concept. In management studies and corporate practice, the idea of the business concept continues to have a significant impact, because it is the nucleus of all the company's guiding values. This means that business concept is just a starting point for all further strategies applied by the company (Alvesson 2002: p.72). It is, for example, the way in which relations with customers and partners are conducted, the way in which products and the company as a whole are promoted, the shared values and attitudes of the company's employees, the company's appearance, and the general atmosphere between employees during and outside work. All these factors make up the culture of an organisation. Therefore, organisational culture can be defined by the behaviours and ways of thinking that distinguish members of one company from another and as a term that refers to all of a company's beliefs, values, and attitudes (Praveena, Fonceca 2023: p. 2945).

It is crucial to remember that organisational culture cannot be equated with the already mentioned national culture. Since a nation is not an organisation, so these two types of culture are different. Diversity in values and behaviours contributes to differences between national and organisational cultures. In a national culture, fundamental principles are learned from the youngest age firstly in the family and near environment,

then later at school. Organisational cultures, on the other hand, are encountered on the threshold of adulthood or shortly after reaching it, when people start working, and their basic values are already long-established. Yet, practices, or a collection of much more surface-level behaviours, form the majority of organisational cultures (Hofstede G., Hofstede G.J. 2007: p. 299).

Between two cultures – Poland and Türkiye

The countries selected for the study, Poland and Türkiye, differ significantly in most cultural aspects. One of the main differences, after language, is religion, which in Poland is Christianity, while in Türkiye the majority of the population follows Islam. Even though these two cultures are so different, they are very similar. Both countries have a very broad history, which, together with beliefs from the past, has a very strong influence on the formation of their culture today. Thus, taking a look at the core of these two distinctive cultures, the family is considered the most important value by both countries inhabitants (Woldu et al. 2013).

These differences in cultural, societal, and organisational behaviours are all potential reasons of visible gender gaps in the countries under study, and above all discrimination against women at a workplace (Holska 2017: p. 16–17). The *Global Gender Gap Report 2023*, analysing economic participation and opportunity, ranked Poland 64th with a score of 0.69, and Türkiye 133rd with a score of 0.5 (on a scale of 0–1, indicating progress in closing the gender gap). Although one may think that Poland looks favourably in this ranking compared to Türkiye, when having a look at the European countries themselves, Poland is behind half of the stakes (see: World Economic Forum 2023). This only confirms the fact that numerous demographic, economic, socio-cultural and legal issues influence the position of women in the labour market, and currently the issue of unequal treatment of women and men at work is a topic that most companies are dealing with, as they already realised how big the problem is and what business consequences it has for both the company and the country's economy.

Let us start the analysis with Poland, because the European Union is characterised by greater gender equality than the Middle East. Compared to other EU states, Poland has a low rate of female labour force participation. Poland had a 67.9% female professional activity rate by the end of 2020, which may seem high when compared to the European Union's rate of 71.9%, but the situation is no longer favourable when considering the rise in these numbers over the previous 15 years. While the growth across the European Union was over 7 percentage points, it was only 4.3 percentage points in Poland (Zielonka 2021). An important point to note, and one that should be emphasised when interpreting these data, is that professional activity rate in referenced study includes people in work, people on long-term leave and unemployed people with relevant status, who are willing and able to work. Professional activity rate indicates the percentage of women economically active in comparison to total number of women in a given country.

When examining the economic participation and opportunity section of the *Gender Equality Index*, Poland's worse condition in comparison to the EU was apparent in recent years. The index value for the European Union in 2022 was 71.7, compared to Poland's 67.3, which was ranked fifth from the bottom (EIGE 2022: p. 26). This indicator demonstrated that Poland's labour market had a very long way to go before gender equality becomes a reality on a European scale. Over time, this situation has changed considerably, and in 2025, Poland is ranked 7th from the top of the list with an index of 74.8. This is a trend that is going in a very good direction, not forgetting that the aim is full gender balance and equality in the workplace.

Figure 1: Gender Equality Index at work and its changes over time.

Domain of work		Change since 2015	Change since 2020
SE	80.4	5.3	2.8
BG	78.6	1.0	-1.2
LV	77.6	-0.5	-1.1
FI	76.6	3.0	0.2
EE	76.5	7.1	2.2
PT	74.9	6.1	3.0
PL	74.8	3.4	0.9
HU	74.8	3.2	4.2
LT	73.9	-1.1	-1.4
SI	73.3	-0.5	-2.6
FR	72.8	6.9	3.3
RO	72.3	0.4	-0.8
MT	72.3	12.2	9.6
IE	72.2	5.8	3.6
SK	70.4	4.5	0.8
DK	70.0	1.4	-1.0
ES	69.4	4.0	0.4
EU-27	69.3	4.2	1.6
LU	69.1	11.1	4.0
BE	69.1	5.0	1.6
HR	68.2	2.6	2.2
EL	67.9	4.4	-0.5
AT	67.8	6.9	2.3
CY	65.3	1.8	2.8
NL	64.5	6.2	4.0
DE	63.9	3.4	1.4
CZ	63.6	1.7	2.2
IT	61.0	2.1	0.5

Source: EIGE 2025: p. 46.

Position of women in labour market in Türkiye seems to look similarly. At the beginning of 20 century in Türkiye the presence of men in wars led to a decrease in their involvement in workforce. This situation affects women's working status. Women highly participated in working life mainly in field of agriculture and performed paid jobs outside of their homes (Koray et al. 1999). By time and increasing gender inequality,

migration to the city, development and change in traditional family structure the rate of female employment in Türkiye started to decrease. Although the women's situation slowly process to a positive direction, and the government ensure higher gender equality than before, there is still an outlook of a highly polarised society with visible social roles formed by national culture. Below, in *Table 1*, the employment of women over 15 years old is presented, because women in the age 15–64 years, who are willing and able to work, are considered to be economically active and are subject to statistical surveys.

Table 1: Employment of women over 15 years old by economic status (in thousands).

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY	TOTAL		MALE		FEMALE	
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
Professionally active	28 343	27 447	19 377	19 046	8 966	8 401
Contract of employment	19 565	19 260	13 561	13 458	6 004	5 803
Employer	1 246	1 226	1 112	1 093	134	133
Own-account workers	4 638	4 407	3 880	3 667	759	740
Unpaid family worker	2 894	2 553	824	828	2 070	1 725
SECTORS	28 343	27 447	19 377	19 046	8 966	8 401
Agriculture	5 077	4 835	2 824	2 852	2 252	1 983
Industry	5 666	5 584	4 327	4 267	1 339	1 318
Construction	1 638	1 748	1 571	1 684	67	64
Services	15 963	15 279	10 655	10 243	5 308	5 036

Source: the author's own elaboration based on publication: TÜİK 2020.

In *Table 1* it can be observed that the number of professionally active women is significantly less than number of men actively participating in working life. The same conclusion can be made when analysing the number of people working on the contract of employment. In 2020 number of women with a contract is less than half, comparing to the number of men with employment contract. The value of female employers is between 130-140 thousands, while the value of male employers is over 1000 thousands. The greatest attention should be paid to the highlighted values (the number of women working unpaid at home). Although this value has decreased significantly from 2019 to 2020, it still accounts for more than 20% of economically active women. This is a very high percentage, considering that only three times as many women work under a contract of employment. Looking at the sectors, in which women are employed, it is noteworthy that the proportion employed in agriculture is decreasing significantly. The overwhelming majority of women are employed in the service sector, where the vast majority will be in education or health care, followed by tourism, mainly in hotels and restaurants.

Table 2: Groups of employed persons over 15 years old by gender (in thousands).

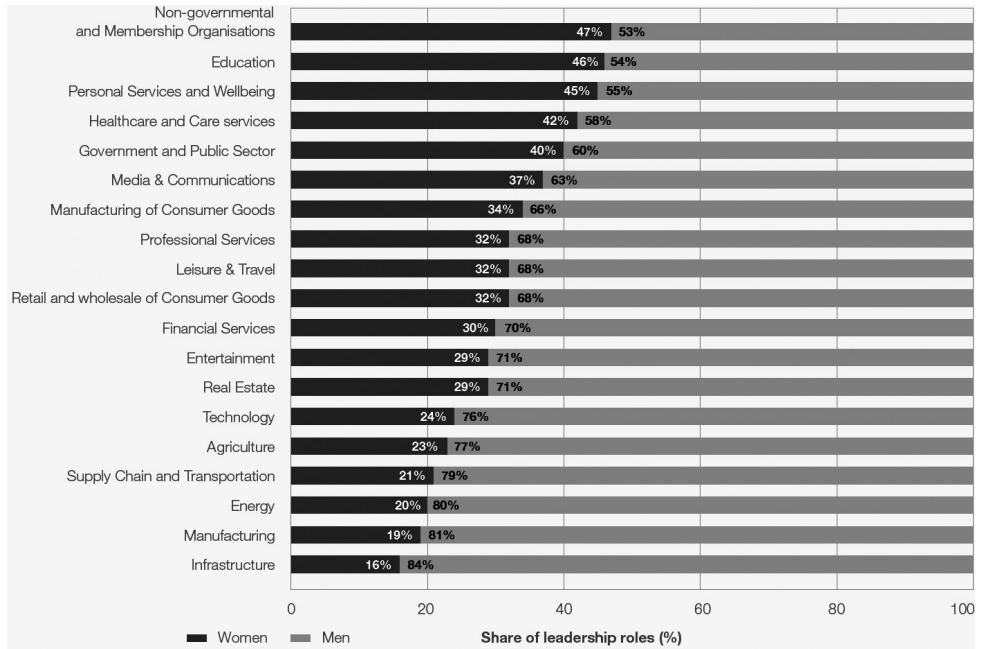
PROFESSION	TOTAL			MALE			FEMALE		
	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019
Managerial Position	1 417	1 487	1 504	1 205	1 267	1 260	213	220	244
Professional Occupation	2 866	2 998	3 157	1 516	1 564	1 671	1 350	1 434	1 486
Technicians and Assistant Professionals	1 636	1 716	1 718	1 211	1 258	1 239	425	459	480
Office and Customer Services	1 984	2 011	1 949	1 152	1 145	1 109	831	866	840
Service and Sales Workers	5 381	5 585	5 673	3 629	3 684	3 758	1 752	1 901	1 915
Quality Agriculture, Forestry and Water Products Employees	4 153	4 106	3 976	2 568	2 574	2 477	1 585	1 532	1 499
Craftsmen and Related Jobs	3 849	3 884	3 519	3 378	3 395	3 072	471	489	447
Plant and Machinery Operators and Assemblers	2 679	2 749	2 591	2 382	2 441	2 289	297	308	303
Unqualified workers	4 222	4 202	3 993	2 419	2 392	2 281	1 804	1 810	1 712
TOTAL	28 187	28 738	28 080	19 460	19 720	19 156	8 728	9 019	8 926

Source: the author's own elaboration based on publication: TÜİK 2017, 2019a,b.

According to the data presented in *Table 2*, apart from the group with the highest duty (service and sales personnel), those who work in jobs that do not require qualifications, then agriculture, forestry and water production workers, followed by professional occupations, are the most frequently chosen types of activity by both genders. Professional groups are presented as a considerable value for females, because jobs such as lecturers, teachers or nurses are included in this category, and women made up a great share of this. It is very worrying that when it comes to the technical professions, women still represent a very small percentage of the total. In 2019, the share of women's participation in technical occupations in Türkiye was less than 28%. Noting the lowest values highlighted in the table, it can be seen that these are women in managerial roles. Women in managerial positions in 2020 accounted for approximately 16%, which means that there is 1 woman for every 6 men. Such low values demonstrate that the management of organisations is not gender-diverse, which causes business growth to suffer.

The representation of each gender in leadership roles, broken down by industry, is a great illustration of how stereotypes impact women's professional lives affecting their decisions connected with education when choosing professional path. Below, the data from the *Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum 2022)* that were collected in 155 different countries, are presented and analysed.

Figure 2: Women in leadership roles (by industry).



Source: World Economic Forum 2022: p. 37.

Figure 2 demonstrates the proportion of a particular gender in leadership roles by industry. The obvious conclusion from the analysis of the figure is that there is a higher percentage of men in management positions in all industries surveyed. The industries with the highest percentage of men are infrastructure, manufacturing, energy, logistics/transportation, supply chain, agriculture, and technology. It is worth noting how large a minority of women are in the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) generally assuming the technical sectors, which are currently the best paid professions in the world. Just in the field of technology 76% of all leadership vacancies are occupied by males, while in the sector of infrastructure same value reaches 84%. Industries, where women in leadership positions are not dominant, but most closely matched by men, are non-governmental organisations, education, healthcare and wellbeing. The world’s statistics are also applicable to both of the studied countries, where women are also in the minority at the managerial positions, with the education and public health sectors accounting for the largest proportion.

Empirical study – methodology

After analysing and exploring the available theory on two cultures, Polish and Turkish, the study focuses on comparative case study using an inductive approach. Two com-

panies from the automotive industry are chosen as an inductive model. Although this is not a representative sample, the research is able to make initial assumptions on the topic in question. A comparative study, therefore, can help to understand the women's situation in organisations similar to those being compared. The study is based on the private experience of the women, the researcher was in close contact with the subjects. The research tool was an ethnographic non-standardised in-depth interview conducted with two female managers of the chosen companies. In these individual interviews, respondents were encouraged to speak freely and without a measurement tool, which was interpreted in order to verify the hypothesis. As this is a qualitative study, the women interviewed talked about their path to a successful career in the automotive industry, the obstacles or opportunities they encountered, and whether their experiences were influenced by the culture and religion, in which they live. The interview consisted of 6 open-ended questions that were structured according to the analysed sources in such way as to extract details that later helped fill gaps in the literature on the research topic. The questions posed to both respondents, although modified according to the needs of the interview, initially were as follows:

- In your opinion, does the national culture influence the company culture?
- What role do women play in your company?
- What is the place and role of women in the automotive industry in general?
- Do you think that women face challenges or obstacles in the workplace precisely because they are women?
- In your opinion, does religion play a significant role in women's business lives?
- What else (if no culture and religion) affects the place and role of women in your company?

As the situation of women and their place in business very much depends on the field, in which the organisation operates, therefore the research was limited in scale to just one sector of the economy. The automotive industry was chosen as the area for conducting the study, because it is an industry heavily influenced by the education of women in STEM fields (i.e. science, technology, engineering and mathematics with a particular emphasis on technology and engineering for this industry). Both the development of STEM fields among women and the growth of the potential of the automotive industry are extremely up-to-date topics, representing current scientific trends.

The usage of described research methods was intended to verify the stated hypothesis that culture and religion have an impact on the place and role of women in business, as the organisational culture is derived precisely from the beliefs, values and norms of the society in question.

Description of surveyed companies

The first company chosen for the study is a Norwegian corporation that operates worldwide, including Poland. The company is a huge corporation with more than 140 plants in over 40 countries, where it employs more than 30,000 people. The company's

main activity is the production of rails and thresholds for cars, made of aluminum. In addition to these main products, the company also offers a range of other, smaller car parts. The company works closely with vehicle manufacturers, becoming a leading supplier to the automotive industry, at the same time conquering in the aluminum industry markets. For the purposes of the study, the described above company (namely its Polish branch in Lodz) will be referred to as *Company X*.

The second company, which for the purposes of the study will be referred to as *Company Y*, was established in Türkiye in 2015. In addition to its participation in local market, where it is the leader in the manufacture of campervans, motorhome overlays and camper trailers, the company is also operating in Germany, where it has a showroom performing sales and after-sales services. Apart from two offices in Türkiye and Germany company established cooperation with dealers from France, Belgium, Spain, United Arab Emirates and Australia, where their products are constantly sold.

What these two surveyed companies have in common is that they both represent the automotive industry and both are struggling to a greater or lesser extent with the employment of women in management positions. The biggest differentiator will be the aspect of the distinct geographic location and national cultures, in which these companies are embedded. To find out more about the differences between companies X and Y, the table below should be examined.

Table 3: The comparison of companies X and Y.

	COMPANY	
	X	Y
Place of establishment	Norway	Türkiye
Date of establishment	1905	2015
Operating countries	40 countries around the world	Türkiye and Germany
Number of plants in studied country	5	2
Number of employees	31 000 total and around 1500 in Polish plants	130
Main product	Aluminium rails and thresholds for passenger cars	Motorhomes, Campervans and Trailers
Annual Production Capacity in studied country	57 000 tones of aluminium parts	240 units
Production Type	Mass, push production	Highly customized, pull production
Annual Income per country	241 832 000 EUR	9 089 600 EUR
Investment	Sale of shares	Private founds

Source: the author's own elaboration based on the data collected during the research.

What can be concluded from *Table 3* is mainly the fact that companies X and Y differ from each other to a great extent; firstly due to their size and organisational structure (as *Company X* is a multinational corporation whose value is assessed on the basis of sold shares in the company, while *Company Y* is a company similar to the structure of a family-owned company, like most Turkish companies, and its source of financing is solely from private sources of income). The annual revenue of each company in the surveyed countries demonstrates very clearly the differences in company size, as does the number of employees. The main products offered by the company are also very different: *Company X* offers individual parts, and its production is a mass production, of the push type (meaning that produced goods based on forecast demands are then pushed out to the customer), while *Company Y* produces to order, which gives the company the character of pull production, based on actual customer purchases.

Research results

As described in the methodology section, in order to assess the business condition of women in countries of research, individual interviews were conducted with two women who hold directorships in the automotive companies. Then interviews were deeply analysed, and the insights drawn from them leading to a scientific discussion. The research led to the following findings.

Both of the respondents stated that the national culture has a huge impact on organisational culture. The degree of dependence is influenced very much by the size and the structure of the organisational society: in a smaller company operating locally in a particular country elements of national culture will be much more visible than in a multinational corporation (where also the differences will be noticed when analysing different international branches of the same company).

Mostly, the differences in organisational culture in various national cultures can be seen in the ways of thinking and approach to work of employees in individual countries. For example, the respondent from the *Company X* stated: „When analysing the culture from the perspective of the plant itself, looking at the behaviour of the people, the leaders, how people build relationships with each other, a lot of clear elements of national culture can be found". The respondent from the *Company Y* said: "When I worked for a large German corporation in my home country, Türkiye, I visited European branches many times on business trips, and everytime I had this feeling like I am visiting completely unknown companies. Working rules, respecting the working hours or meetings schedules were always puzzling for me, how within one organisation the working system could be so dissimilar".

Similar conclusion can be drawn when it comes to the values. The values in a large corporation are common to its subsidiaries around the world, but each unit in each country develops some kind of its own values that can be called the national culture interpretation of the overall corporate values.

In cases of both studies companies the number of women in employment is a minority (in *Company X* value close to 40%, while in *Company Y* value around 16%). For *Company X*

it is a challenge to find a female candidate for managerial positions, while *Company Y* struggle to find such a candidate for production unit. The respondent from the *Company X* said: "This is the first problem faced by the company, so it constantly tries to increase the percentage of women employed in the company in general. Another challenge the company is currently facing is to increase the number of women in management positions". The respondent from the *Company Y* specified: "The biggest problem is finding women to work in the production unit. It is extremely important to increase the number of women working in indirect production, because women do their work very accurately. Common factor that causes problem with women's employment in the company is that often, despite the fact that our company offers special programmes for women who are mothers, women still require special treatment due to the fact that they are combining family and working life."

Both respondents strongly equates the situation of women in their companies with the situation of women in the automotive sector in general. They believe that here is a widespread stereotype that industry is generally a man's business and that it stems directly from national traditions and beliefs. The respondent from the *Company X* explained the problem: "It is not only applicable to the automotive industry, but also to the industry as a whole, it could be heavy industry, aluminium, metal or any other one. Companies are trying to introduce many interesting programmes to encourage women to try working in the industry, but it is still a challenging task. If women work in the automotive industry, it is most often in the financial or human resources departments, not directly related to the production unit."

The employment of women in the automotive industry is a considerable issue in both countries of research. The respondent from the *Company Y* underlined: "Although my company employs only 16% of women, this is quite a high value when analysing from the perspective of other companies from the same sector in Türkiye. [...] When I started working in this sector in 2002, I took a managerial position in one of the largest companies producing premium brands in Türkiye. For that time, for the entire corporation, there were 10 operational managers, among them only 2 women. Although a lot has changed over the last 20 years, [...] there are still only 2 women among the 10 managers, and moreover, there were years when there was only one female representant."

Both respondents, despite the fact that neither they nor any of their co-workers experience gender discrimination in their current work environments, agree that such situations still frequently occur, especially in small, local companies. For example, the respondent from the *Company X* said: "I recall a situation, several years ago, during the recruitment process for a managerial position in promising small startup and the final interview with my future supervisor, I was asked how realistically I imagine combining a demanding job position with parenting a toddler. In most significant, international companies, such questions remain forbidden, and companies such as mine, for example, adhere to a policy of equality, while not interfering in the private life of the job candidate, which openly discriminated against most mothers before taking up a managerial position". The respondent from the *Company Y* concluded: "Especially in small enterprises questions

such ones about children or details of the family situation are considered as absolutely normal in Türkiye and are not believed to violate the candidate's privacy."

Both respondents agreed that very often the root of discrimination against women in the workplace can be found in the women themselves and the fact that they do not believe enough in their own abilities and value. The respondent from the *Company X* noted: „In my opinion, women do not believe in themselves enough to work in a team composed largely of men and deal with technical topics as part of their daily duties. It is boosted by the fact that women often do not have basic knowledge of even current trends in the car market". The respondent from the *Company Y* argued: "I have noticed that when negotiating wages, male employees are not afraid to openly ask for a high salary raise. However, women usually do not believe that they can get more by just negotiating their conditions and usually accept the amount proposed by us (employer) without any lengthy discussions."

The interviewed women stated that the religion plays a significant role in women's business lives. The respondent from the *Company X* explained: "It is the church that encourages women to deliver as many offsprings as possible, and obliges the husband to support the entire family as its leader. In such model of a family with many children, a woman usually no longer has the opportunity to pursue her own professional career, and she takes up professions, in which the role of a woman is formulated by the society, so it is still childcare, but in kindergarten or school". The respondent from the *Company Y* said: "The influence of religion is most noticeable when celebrating all kinds of religious holidays. During the holy month for Muslims, called Ramadan, the working day is shorter, so that each employee has enough time to spend time with family during this special period". However: "When it comes to the influence of religion directly on women, it is visible from the very moment of choosing education for children. When there are two children in a family, a girl and a boy, due to the religious premise, [...] the whole family will support the boy, therefore, invest in his education and development, while the girl will stay at home and be taught housework [...]. The boundary between what caused the current situation of women in business, whether it was more the influence of religion itself or a long-standing tradition, is very difficult to determine, because this line between these two is slightly visible."

Both respondents struggled to show factors influencing the situation of women in business that were not grounded in the national culture. The most prominent were women's behavioural traits taken from home, the environment they grew up in, the fact that they do not believe in themselves enough and its close connection with the place, where they grew up or still live. The respondent from the *Company X* said: "I believe that what a given woman thinks about herself and whether her self-confidence is enough has a lot to do in order to succeed in a woman's business life. Polish women often do not believe in their success while pursuing career paths [...]. Women are simply afraid of this challenge (demanding job) and the fact that they will not be able to combine work and family life". The respondent from the *Company Y* noticed: "In fact, all the factors that come to my mind that influence the place of women in organisations have a more or

less direct link and originate from the national culture. The behaviour of women can be taken as such factor, because they themselves often demonstrate no desire for work and personal development, and their place of unpaid work is home. [...] The behaviour of such group of women derives from their upbringing, the model roles that people are taught from childhood and the environment, in which they are". Moreover: "Women living in big cities are less influenced by society and the rules that govern it, they are more open and courageous, they are not afraid of others' opinions, because they are not recognised in society. Small towns, especially in the east of Türkiye, tend to be very conservative, not allowing women to develop in any professional field."

Conclusions

A careful analysis of the statements made by two respondents allows us to draw the conclusion that, regardless of the geographical position, structure or size of the organisation, national culture influences organisational culture, thus, also influencing the place and role of women in working life. Although the companies surveyed are very different from each other, they are strongly influenced by the culture, in which they are embedded. Depending on the location (in Poland or Türkiye), the level of cultural dependency differs. For example, in Türkiye a culture steeped in conservative religion will have a much greater impact on the social role of women and their employment than in Poland, but everywhere in the world culture and religion have an impact on the role of women. The automotive industry in particular is one that suffers from widely known prejudices and stereotypes about women working in its field. Therefore, companies must make efforts to ensure that their internal policy is as close as possible to the policy of diversity and gender equality since it can bring enormous value added to the company. It is also a good idea to introduce greater transparency in the company when it comes to data on the gender of people applying for a given position and transparency in the earnings achieved by employees at various levels in the organisation. Such activities certainly encourage women to try their best at recruitment process and then start a career in the automotive sector, at the same time strengthening global statistics on women's employment in this field. It is positive from a business perspective that both respondents not only agreed but even highlighted the great importance of creating gender-diverse teams, which are more creative, efficient and faster, because the division of responsibilities and individual special traits also looks different, when the team is diverse.

This research should be understood as an exploratory *case study* intended to illustrate the relationship between organisational culture and the position of women in business. While the presented material provides initial insights into the analysed phenomenon, it is not fully sufficient to conclusively verify the hypothesis or to draw fully representative conclusions. The findings, therefore, constitute a starting point for further research, which should include a larger and more diverse sample of companies with different structures and sizes. Such extended studies would allow for more robust verification of the hypothesis and greater generalisability of the results.

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