

## Chapter 5: Community life in the eyes of young people

Previous chapters have sought to show that the category of a minority language speaker cannot be precisely delineated due to the fact that language competences and practices, as well as the extent to which young people identify themselves with a broadly defined minority group, may vary among them. Not only is the ideal minority language speakers difficult to define; the category of a language community is equally vague. Researchers dealing with ethnography of speaking posited the distinction between language communities, similar to Anderson's imagined communities centred around the ideal (or standard) language being this group's identification mark, and speech communities, being created among people using certain language codes and sharing language practices (cf. Hymes, 1986; Duranti, 1988; Silverstein, 1996). A speech community is succinctly defined by Suzanne Romaine (1994: 22), as "a group of people who do not necessarily share the same language, but share a set of norms and rules for the use of language. The boundaries between speech communities are essentially social rather than linguistic."

Young people can therefore identify with a minority language community regardless of their actual language competence, but the strength of the bond and motivation behind it depends on their upbringing, experience and cultural practices. It is doubtful whether it can be legitimately stated that young people belong to a specific language community defined on the basis of using (one variety of) a minority language. On the other hand, they can be considered a part of speech community including people who interact with each other and share more than a common language code. Such groups formed around young minority activists can be commonly attested, as young people consciously involved in language minorities establish various types of communities, which may not necessarily be based on speaking a minority language, but which are involved in various activities related to this language.

In my characterization of the groups comprising young people representing minority languages, I shall refer both to classical notions of social bonds and to concepts derived from present-day anthropology and sociology, pertaining to various kinds of relational dependences, which my interlocutors can potentially enter. Many of those theoretical notions have met with (often well-founded) criticism, but they still appear to be useful for systematizing the ideas stemming from the words of young people, who often present a simplified, if not clichéd, account of relations and bonds developing among minority members. What is important for my research is how young people perceive and describe bonds between themselves and a certain broadly understood group (the imagined community), and also bonds with their peers, with respect to whom they define and calibrate their identity. As will become apparent in this chapter, when trying to characterize their

communities, my interlocutors refer to how they imagine the world and the life of this community in the past and it is against this background that they present the account of their community's current practises. Interestingly, in these accounts young people deploy sociological theories, known to them to varying degrees, describing the life of communities and civil societies. Echoes of such theories reverberate in how young people perceive relationships within their own group. Owing to that, I choose to apply the category of community when describing my interlocutors' viewpoint on collective life, despite the fact that from the anthropological perspective, it may not always be adequate to the types of groups formed by young people. This concept is, however, most often (if not too often) used by my interlocutors to define their place in the world.

### **Minority culture as a community – a paradise lost?**

The category of community is fluid, especially when applied to young people raised in the world of instantaneous information flow and strong individualization. Rooted in the nineteenth century, the classical definitions of community pointed out that the ways of forming communities evolve together with modernization, population growth, development of transport, social mobility, urbanization, industrialization and division of labour, all promoting individualization of human beings (cf. Olcoń-Kubicka, 2009: 16). Of the various concepts proposed in the literature, the distinction between community (German *Gemeinschaft*) and civil society (German *Gesellschaft*) put forward by Ferdinand Tönnies (2001) has proved to be particularly useful. On this account, a community is formed by a group of people closely related to one another by intensive and organic direct interactions. Within a community so understood there are strong control and dependence mechanisms that hold the group together, and the number of institutions and subgroups operating within this community is small. On the other hand, a civil society, determining relations among individuals in the modern world, is characterized by indirect instrumental or rational bonds motivated by a common goal. The relations among humans are typically mediated and institutionalized. In a similar vein to Tönnies, Émile Durkheim (1997) also distinguished two types of social bonds dependent on the character of human relations. Individuals within a community are linked automatically and unreflectively by “mechanical solidarity”; an individual breaking it would face punishment. Relations among individuals in modern developed societies are governed mostly by “organic solidarity,” following from the division of labour and the need to collaborate. Under this type of dependence it is an individual's awareness and ability of reflection that are conducive to performing the common task successfully. In a community based on mechanical solidarity, an individual does not choose to belong, but is born into it. Membership in organic solidarity groups is chosen by an individual, whose identity is formed independently, albeit in some connection with the group (Malešević & Haugaard, 2002: 5).

Opposition between types of relationships among people depending on the cultural and social circumstances is also discussed by Max Weber (1978), who advocated the distinction between “communal relationship” (German *Vergemeinschaftung*), based on a subjective sense of belonging, affect and tradition and “associative relationship” (German *Vergesellschaftung*), based on rationality as well as common values and goals.

There is a good reason to recall here the classical notions indicating that communities as small isolated groups tied by strong direct bonds no longer exist, as it is this image of a minority community that my interlocutors envision as an ideal pattern and object of their sentiment. Young people imagine the ideal minority community in which their ancestors lived “in olden days,” vaguely referring to the lifetime of their great-grandparents, when their grandparents were children, which is almost an unreal perspective for my interlocutors. This vision represents life in a traditional culture, in a “pre-” epoch: pre-rationalization and pre-individualization, the epoch prior to social, cultural and media developments that shattered bonds uniting individuals. The strongly mythologized traditional world based on rituals and ceremonies was characterized by “multifunctionality of products and actions,” associated with “the relative uniformity of society, holistic character of social roles and bonds tying a group together” (Pawluczuk, 1978: 53). The essence of this world is stability, oral tradition and practical transmission of knowledge within families and the community. People make their living by growing crops and seek authority among the elderly, who possess wisdom and experience (cf. Dobrowolski, 1966). At the same time, according to Anthony Giddens (1990: 36) “inherent in the idea of modernity is a contrast with tradition.” Despite the fact that the world of young people living today is – in their own perception – light years away from traditional society, they constantly invoke this image when trying to describe their own participation in a minority culture. The community imagined by the young people was based on close bonds between their ancestors, strong attachment to the land, joint work and celebrations. This kind of life, according to my interlocutors, is what enabled communication only in the minority language, since the community spent all the time together. Interestingly, this vision does not accommodate cultural interactions with other groups, which could threaten the harmonious symbiosis within the community and their isolation from external influences. The imagined predecessors did not have to reflect upon their cultural identity, since if there are no ethnic boundaries, identity is not consciously felt. A secondary school student presents the following vision of the past Sorbian community:

**S17F(S):** The villages where they lived were 98% Sorbian. They went to school for eight years at most [...] Agriculture was very well developed, even more than nowadays and it was their way of earning their daily bread. They didn't make money working on a computer but by doing farm work, where Sorbian was spoken all the time. Or take another example: nowadays when you need a duvet, you go out and buy one. But back then women sat together, plucking feathers, singing and speaking Sorbian. These relationships, they didn't have to be aware of them.

The lack of awareness and reflection upon identity that used to characterize minority groups is often emphasized in the statements. According to my interlocutors, their ancestors simply lived their Sorbian/Kashubian/Breton/Welsh lives without making any choices, as this was the culture into which they were born and there was no other, and without making any attempts to pursue alternative lifestyles, as they were not aware of such opportunities, mostly due to limited access to formal education and lack of mobility. Those communities were based on family bonds, as Tönnies' definition states. This image of a community, resembling nineteenth-century romantic vision of idyllic rural life close to nature, is envisaged as the ideal, but young people are fully aware that this ideal belongs to the past and could not be possibly revived today, due to the magnitude of changes that have taken place. One of my interviewees, A., who is engaged in the Kashubian national movement, refers to these changes as "the encroachment of Polish culture," and what he means is that increasing cultural interactions with the Poles led to the gradual assimilation of the Kashubs. He also mentions the severing of family ties due to individualization and other phenomena, which resulted in growing loneliness of individuals. All this reflects the potency of sociological theories of post-modernity. The young man notes another aspect of minority cultures: today, they are being revived and not just preserved, which means they are being created anew on the basis of selected past patterns.

**A20M(K):** For my grandparents, this was something they were born with. Their Kashubian identity was something they were not aware of but at the same time something they could not deny. And because of that there was no pride resulting from being a Kashub. They were just born Kashubs and that was it. [...] They didn't have awareness of their ethnicity but the bond among them was very strong. Mostly based on family ties [...] Today we are living in a completely different world and this is not enough – unfortunately the family ties have been broken and the families themselves have so much to do with Polish culture that what Kashubian culture needs is more of a revival than preservation. So the difficulty is that there are no bonds anymore and we have to create them anew.

The statements made by young Kashubs talking about the differences between what used to be and what is now are characteristically similar. If we set side by side the testimony of a 23-year-old student who started learning Kashubian recently and who discovered her roots as a teenager, and the words of a young woman born into a Kashubian-speaking family, it is evident that some aspects of Kashubian culture are perceived in the same way, regardless of the cultural and language background of the observer:

**F23F(K):** Well, I think that my grandparents were not quite aware of the fact that they were a kind of ethnic minority. They knew they were born here, that they spoke Kashubian and that they were Kashubs but that wasn't full awareness. Then, in my dad's generation people stopped using Kashubian among themselves. And, in my generation, it was reborn anew. Not only within families but also outside.

The impulse comes from the outside, for instance from school, the awareness of Kashubia and “Kashubianness.”

**H24F(K):** I think my grandparents didn’t even know they were Kashubs. They knew for sure that they spoke Kashubian and that there is the other language, that is Polish. But my grandparents [...] have problems speaking Polish. Kashubian is their first language and they have never pondered on being some minority, or where they live, that this region is exceptional in any sense or that it has borders. It never occurred to them. It is our generation who have an opportunity to decide if we are Kashubs and what our attitude is. For them, it was just natural and for us... I don’t want to suggest that it is artificial, all I want to say is that we have a choice and we can look at it differently.

Both women note that in old times the Kashubs were not thought of as a group distinct from the Polish community, or in fact they were not thought of as a community of any specific kind, such as minority or nationality. They were largely unaware of their identity (“were not quite aware of the fact that they were a kind of ethnic minority,” “didn’t even know they were Kashubs”). “Minority” is a political term that is meaningful only relative to a dominant culture and state (Eriksen, 2010: 147–148). It is against the background of another group that a community notices cultural differences and defines itself in this context. The cultural change, which is not precisely described in the statements but which includes interruption of language transmission and lifestyle change, loosened human bonds referred to by H. as “natural.” For her part, F. notes that the Kashub identity is revived “from the outside,” through political, educational and cultural actions carried out in Kashubia. It follows that family ceases to be a guarantor of preserving the minority culture. As this culture has become institutionalized, it is now necessary to make an identity choice, which can be seen as an opportunity to leave the group and join the mainstream culture or as a conscious and responsible participation in the minority culture situated in opposition to the dominant culture.

The way young people look at the institutionalization of a minority culture is reminiscent of Tönnies’s civil society, in which actions are performed by organizations, and individuals constitute a group through pursuit of a common goal, with this goal being political, such as recognition of a minority status, or societal, such as revitalization of language and culture. Characteristically, the division into community and civil society comes with an appraisal: community is authentic and emotional whereas civil society is artificial and oriented towards practical purposes.

Authenticity is invoked in the following statement by a Sorbian secondary school student, for whom the ideal of “real” Sorbian life can be attained through living in a village, farm work, participation in the community life, such as cultivating customs and mutual support, and speaking Sorbian:

**J17F(S):** For me, a real Sorb was raised in the country, because it’s where the old traditions and customs are cultivated, for instance *mejemetanje*.<sup>43</sup> I’ve never seen

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43 The custom of putting up a tree in May.

it in any town. The rural community is also very important. Simply helping each other. And agriculture, which was the main source of income for our ancestors. And the Sorbian language, of course, growing up in the country, on the whole.

When the contemporary model of life is confronted with the ideal of the traditional community, for whom Sorbian was the means of everyday communication and who lived in harmony off their physical labour, young people often ask the question of whether this kind of life would be now possible at all. As the following statement shows, the answer is negative:

**F20F(S):** There didn't use to be any other option than the Sorbian lifestyle. I mean everybody wore Sorbian costumes ... Nowadays, there are so many other possibilities that it is no longer so [...] In old times they simply didn't have a choice, everyone wore the same things. Holy masses or holidays were more festive. It was very important, but things are no longer like that.

In the eyes of the young, the traditional life is no longer possible since there are "other possibilities." They believe that it is no longer possible to be "simply" a representative of a minority because life offers many opportunities. They underscore that there was no alternative to the community life ("there didn't use to be any other option"): everybody took part in the collective life and holidays or otherwise they would have been excluded from the community governed by strong internal regulations. This kind of reasoning corresponds to sociological theories pointing out that modernization was accompanied by increasing individualization. The beginnings of this process date back to the nineteenth century. According to Georg Simmel, when people liberated themselves from "the privileges of the higher estates, the despotic control of commerce and life in general, the still potent survivals of the guilds, the intolerant coercion by the church, the feudal obligations of the peasantry, the political tutelage dominating the life of the state, and the weakness of municipal constitutions" (Simmel 1950: 64) differences among individuals started to appear. Initially however, this happened largely within the bounds of social institutions that played integrating and socializing roles. As is pointed out by sociologists, the extreme form of individualization came together with the "second" (Beck, Bons & Lau, 2003) or "late" (Giddens, 1991) modernity, characterized by the detraditionalization of collective life, the decreased significance of social institution and the transformation of human relations. Discussing the above-mentioned notions, Olcoń-Kubicka (2009: 24) writes: "The disintegration of categorical communities and devaluation of authorities shifts the focus on an individual, whose actions are now evaluated on the basis of their own system of values." Despite the fact that such claims cannot be accepted uncritically (cf. King, 1999; Adams, 2003), this is how my interlocutors perceive the world they live in.

Young people observe that, unlike the imagined world of their ancestors, the present-day world forces them to make decisions: which group to join, which cultural activities to participate in, how to define themselves with respect to others. Due to the necessity to make a choice, the traditional customs and habits that used

to be constitutive of a group and that served as means of defining this group's identity become relative. When a group's unity is no longer manifested through common customs, they cease to be perceived as significant or serious. This is what transpires from the following statement made by a Breton associated with a Celtic group. Talking about dancing, which is his greatest passion, the man illustrates the change: dancing used to play a role in providing communal bonds (cf. Jigourel, 2009), today, it is performed "for pleasure" or for preserving the tradition and culture:

**I25M(B):** We dance for pleasure. They also enjoyed it, but they did it in everyday life. Is it the same? I think it is difficult to compare. Tradition matters to us. This is what helps culture survive, as well as participation in festivals and internships.

The somewhat simplified account of the transition from the traditional to modern forms of life offered by sociologists harmonizes with the perception of the world by my interlocutors: due to modernization and individualization a community has turned into a civil society, and life based on direct bonds, the rhythm of nature and communal rituals has adopted institutionalized forms providing the foundation of the group's existence, with visual symbols playing a major role (cf. Billig, 1995). Nowadays, the life of a minority crucially depends on such institutions as school, which pass on the knowledge of history, customs and traditions to the next generations. This is what a Kashubian secondary school student observes about the differences in the life of a minority then and now:

**X18M(K):** [...] we learn Kashubian and they just talked without any effort, they didn't have to learn. They followed their conscience in how they behaved with respect to others. But I think it was totally different with the customs. Perhaps they are still preserved nowadays but surely it is done in a modern way.

**NDR:** *What do you mean?*

**X18M(K):** It used to be different, more like a holiday. Now everything is prepared, the customs are staged and that's it. In old times it was more of a true celebration. Now it is more official.

The young observe that participation in "officially" prepared activities differs from genuine "celebration" not only in practical terms but also in that it no longer evokes collective emotions or bonds. This is what the words "the customs are staged and that's it" indicate – the spectacle is directed and there are viewers rather than participants. Some young Kashubs point out that cultivating old traditions could be seen as transgression of social norms:

**J21M(K):** [...] Such as, for instance, hoaxes on New Year's Eve. Nobody does it anymore but when I was a little boy we used to call in on our neighbours and play tricks. No one was surprised or upset, it was just a Kashubian custom and everyone knew that. If I did something like that today, people would call the police immediately.

Longing for the unconscious way of belonging to a minority community results to a large extent from the difficulties and sacrifices entailed by a decision that people need to make today if they want to be a part of such a community. This is why young people often refer to the traditional bond-based community as “a paradise lost.” This kind of vision is particularly strong among Kashubs who contrast the past “authenticity” with the present “artificiality” or even “commercial character” (cf. Nowicka, 2006). One of the Kashubian women says:

**I22F(K):** That was so natural for them. [...] To me they were so true, so real as Kashubs. First, they spoke Kashubian fluently, second, they spoke all the time and weren't ashamed of it. Third, what made them stand out [...] was rooted in their awareness. The fact that they were so religious, that they were so hard-working. Nothing unusual, but they were unique because of these qualities. And now I can see, and it annoys me, that the “Kashubianness” is a bit just to show off and also possibly to get some benefits because we know that Kashubian is fashionable so perhaps it can be useful, we can get some profits so let's go for it.

Such impressions stem partially from the rapid pace of changes that have been recently taking place in Kashubia: due to “Kashubianness” being *en vogue*, many people have changed their attitude to culture and many people make their living carrying out some kind of cultural activities. The traditions cultivated at home have now become part of public space, with a number of ways becoming available to develop these traditions and a number of people conducting their own policies of ethnicity. Nurturing “Kashubianness” may also be a means to achieving some other ends.

Young Sorbs present yet another viewpoint on the cultural change. For them, the past has become mythologized, with historical events playing no significant role. When Sorbs gained freedom after the reunification of Germany in 1990, processes such as labour migration and general mobility, previously hampered by the communist system, were unleashed. It has to be emphasized that from among all my interlocutors only young Sorbs see freedom as a threat to their group's continuity. Young people representing the other minorities do notice negative consequences of the cultural change, but they are happy or even proud to decide about their identity. The Sorbs, however, resort to metaphors of disaster that fell upon their community. In the light of sociological and anthropological analyses the diagnosis is correct, but taking into consideration it has been made by young people who have their dreams and ambitions, it calls for further scrutiny. A Sorbian secondary school student reveals her opinion as follows:

**E17F(S):** It was obvious that they were Sorbs and there was nothing else. But now [...] it's a little different because you can leave Lusatia or you can choose to be a Sorb, unlike it used to be in the country. Nowadays this choice is even more important than back then. Another thing is that children used to do as they were told by their parents, even adult children. Today it is no longer so, children have their own opinions.

Interestingly, E. and many others voice a sentiment for the world in which the community holds together and the bonds among them stem from generally obeyed rules. Today, as she says, “children have their own opinions,” which sounds somewhat pejorative, and so does the very possibility of choosing a cultural identity. Another Sorbian teenager speaks in a similar tone:

**S17F(S):** On the one hand you can be happy that you can do anything, but for a Sorb it’s not like that at all. I guess even in East Germany it was better when there were limitations. [...] A teacher and a caregiver were the main jobs for women. Working with children was something natural for a woman. And today, well, we’ll all become engineers or scientists and there will be no one left at home? No one will learn craftsmanship or farming. [...] To find your own path in Sorbian life is a kind of Odyssey. You have to find your priorities and tasks. You can be happy when you say to yourself later on “OK, I’m not a doctor who could work in Munich or Dresden, but Sorbian is not spoken there.” You are happy when you do something for the Sorbian nation.

The reasoning presented by S. is premised on the assumption that the change of lifestyle caused Sorbian women to drop their traditional occupations, which involved speaking Sorbian and cultivating Sorbian culture among children, in order to pursue careers which offer them opportunities of self-advancement. Typical Sorbian community-building activities were likewise replaced by professions requiring migration. According to S., if individual abilities are the only limit to choosing a lifestyle, Sorbian culture is endangered. Consequently, to save this culture it is necessary to sacrifice oneself and one’s own aspirations of individual development in fields other than Sorbian culture. Few people are prepared to make such sacrifices – both of these Sorbian interlocutors, by the way, are going to university and planning to live “in town,” i.e. outside the Sorbian community, at least until they set up families. This is how the first part of S’s statement can be understood: everybody can make a choice and take any decision but if you want to be a Sorb, your choice is limited. The issue mentioned by many other speakers is also touched upon here: the old generations living in the traditional world did not have to nurture their identity in any way: they were born into a culture and inherited it. For young people, this is no something longer obvious. Here is what a young Kashub says about making a choice and freedom as a threat to culture:

**N22M(K):** [...] the world didn’t use to offer so much to young people. Today there seems to be so many things, such an array of options for them that traditional life doesn’t seem to be important or attractive. Young people often think that Kashubia and Kashubian are our grandparents’ cup of tea.

This student characteristically refers to young people as “them,” in this way distancing himself from ethnically undecided people and indicating clearly that he is among those who have made a decision. In the world where everything is a matter of choice, it is individuals who have to decide if, why and how they want to identify with a minority culture.

## Minority identity as an option

Since the traditional minority community has undergone a major transformation, the way of entering such a community as well as the character of belonging and experiencing a bond with others have also changed. Participation in a group is now subject to reflective verification, or in other words “Just as community collapses, identity is invented” (Young, 1999: 164). Polish cultural anthropologist Roch Sulima describes the differences between the different types of bonds: “Sameness is heritage, identity is autonomy. There is an object element in sameness (objects belonging to the family or community, sacred places or landscape memorials). Identity is of a relational character, it is a point of reference. Sameness is expressed via oppositions: us vs. them, me vs. us, and also me vs. me in self-communication. Identity is expressed via relations between me and you, or us and you” (Sulima, 2001: 140). Here the difference is underscored between the feeling of sameness within one group as opposed to another group, rooted in the past and in the memory, and an individual autonomous decision about identity and building relations with others who have made the same choice. This distinction has further consequences concerning what an individual’s participation in a minority involves, both from the perspective of that individual and the group.

Community in Tönnies’ sense, appearing in the young people’s visions of the past, was based on a number of objective features, distinguishing one group from another. Such features included origins, common language, customs and religion (cf. Posern-Zieliński, 2005). Nowadays, however, due to gradual disintegration of compact groups, weakening language transmission, the blurring of ethnic boundaries with respect to objective features and the simultaneous sharpening of boundaries by identity policies conducted by minorities, individuals can find their place in a group and identify with it, regardless of their descent. Young people not only feel that they can choose their identity; making a choice seems inevitable. They think along similar lines as Anthony Giddens (1991: 5): “[t]he more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options.” These options include not only the dominant culture tempting young people with attractive lifestyle, career and personal development prospects or opportunities of rich social life and the minority culture, the value of which has to be appreciated on an individual basis. Alternatives to these options are provided by all possible lifestyles and identities surrounding an individual in the contemporary world and having “global flows” (Appadurai, 1996). Young people consider themselves authors of their biographies, believing that they can decide who they want to be and on what principles. Ulrich Beck (1992) refers to this phenomenon as “choice biography” or “self-reflexive biography,” and calls contemporary people *homo optionis*. The necessity to choose identity on every possible level of life is not by any means limited to minorities, but in the case of young members of minorities this process is much more conscious, since they are

constantly confronted with questions about their status and identity, having to explain their decisions now and again.

Another factor supporting the need to base decisions concerning identity and participation in a minority group on self-reflection is the belief that there are other ways of entering a group than being born into a community, i.e. through identity based on objective features. This belief is widespread among my interlocutors and the people among whom they live and with respect to whom they define their identity. By this token, the choice of identity based on subjective features, i.e. intention to join in and reflection upon membership in a culture, becomes open to people who have not had any family connections with this culture. The former type of identification, known as primordial, is premised in the assumption that the ethnic bond is buried deeply in the consciousness of group members outside their rationality. The latter type is related to an instrumental approach to cultural identity, which can be used for achieving economic or political goals (cf. Geertz, 1963; Eller & Coughlan, 1993). In theory, the two approaches pertain to two different models of minority cultures: the community model and the civil society model. In practice, however, as is evident in the statements produced by my interlocutors, the two models of minority identity are intertwined and equally important. It has to be noted that even though young people appreciate the importance of culture as an inherited value, they do not exclude those on whom it was not passed by previous generations. Primordialism is in this case free from dangerous ideas that, according to Arjun Appadurai (1996), led to ethnic wars and sanctioned the notion of anciently-rooted differences between groups. By evoking the idea of heritage, young people construct the mythical past of a group, which may provide them with a solid foundation at the time of identity crisis. At the same time, young people intend this foundation to be available to all individuals constituting a minority. Shutting themselves away from "others," which can be observed in the speech of some young activists, is therefore motivated by the desire to emphasize the group's strength and distinctiveness.

Theories of identity at the age of late modernity present individuals as detached from the cultural context from which they originate. When listening to the testimonies, however, it can be noted that the young people's identity dilemmas refer to the cultural heritage and their position with respect to it. Many of them are deeply immersed in the local environment, enjoying support of their families or peer groups of various kinds (cultural, social or political), which reassure them in their choices. While reflecting upon their identity and opting for a minority group, most of them take the cultural heritage into consideration, at the same time keeping in mind that it can be either obtained directly or through individual interest. Here is what one young Kashub says about his feeling Kashubian through upbringing in a Kashubian family:

**L23M(K):** First of all, we live in Kashubia. My parents have lived here since their childhood, like their parents. They were never ashamed to speak Kashubian and they always used this language [...] and thanks to this, the language has survived,

like in not so many families [...] So the language is one thing. Second, the customs, which we have plenty of, mostly connected with local holidays. And songs, music means a lot in Kashubia. [...] All this is passed from one generation to another, and I hope it will always be like that.

The reasons why the young man identifies himself with Kashubian culture correspond to all the postulates of primordial identity: origins, family, language, customs and communal life based on strong bonds among group members. At the same he admits that “Kashubianness” was much talked about in his family, and because of that his identity was shaped consciously. The upbringing of this Breton secondary school student was similar in this respect:

**G16M(B):** [...] I was born in Brittany. My dad is involved in politics. So in a way this is not my choice because I was born in a family which made me predestined to become Breton. But I also wanted to be Breton. And it is a question of desire. It is a choice, it's all about whether you want it or not. There are people who say: “I'm French” and even if they live in Brittany, they are French.

This teenager emphasizes that he feels connected to Brittany not only through his place of birth and living but also through his upbringing, as his father is a Breton activist. He can be said to have inherited the Breton identity as cultural capital, which is very highly valued in his environment. Still, the teen stresses that he wanted to be Breton. This is important because, and this point is rarely brought up in the statements, not every inhabitant of Brittany is ethnically Breton. Regardless, then, of how bonds with culture were created, membership in it depends on the cultural context in which an individual functions or which they invoke. It is especially important in the case of young people who happen not to have any resources of minority awareness at home or in some other immediate environment.

In this context, it may be interesting to consider the following statements by a young Kashubian activist, saying that when language transmission was weak and assimilation to the dominant culture took place, membership in the minority culture has to be brought to the fore:

**A20M(K):** I was raised in a Kashubian family. Both my parents are Kashubs, and so are my grandparents, everyone. But my identity was suspended because nothing followed from it. If someone asked me if I was a Kashub I would say yes, but somehow it didn't mean a lot. My parents spoke Polish to me, grandparents too. [...] In my family there wasn't any great Kashubian patriotism.

This student sees his identity against the background of both models. He identifies as a Kashub, because he comes from a Kashubian family who spoke Kashubian and lived in the region (objective features of cultural membership). However, until the time when he developed an interest in Kashubian culture, started asking questions and learning the language, which he did not acquire at home, and then became involved in Kashubian political and cultural causes (instrumental ethnicity), he thought of his identity as “suspended,” i.e. not fulfilled. Looking at young

representatives of minority cultures from a broader perspective, it appears that a “suspended identity” is widespread: they identify with a group to some extent, but they do not care about its future or about preservation of the language. When making decisions, they are not driven by the need to satisfy the group’s interest but their own. The two typically pull in opposite directions, with the group interest not being profitable. Leoš Šatava (1999; 2005) refers to such individuals as being “ethnically indifferent” and demonstrates that this “grey zone” of the young indifferent to their ethnic origin and group membership is on the rise.

This phenomenon was invoked in a number of testimonies, in which it was stated that in many cases having the choice of identifying with the minority culture often means failing to make any choice, which boils down to an unconscious negative choice:

**E25M(K):** I would be [a Kashub], not matter what. But there’s always an option to shut yourself away from this, to leave and forget [...]. So it is surely a conscious choice, I’m sure it is.

A conscious choice can, young people feel, be made in favour of the minority culture or against it. The former should be accompanied by active involvement in its cause, the latter means complete rejection of one’s identity. However, there is a whole continuum of shades in between the two extremes, comprising passive members of the group, or people who are ethnically undecided or indifferent. Researchers studying young people belonging to minorities are aware that their attitudes and the next generations’ desire to socialize in a minority culture will determine the future of these cultures to a large extent (cf. Šatava, 1999: 100). Hence every conscious choice made by an individual is significant. A young Kashubian woman observes what follows:

**I22F(K):** [...] parents may be for example Kashubs, but it does not necessarily mean that their child will be a Kashub too. I have seen many such cases where it was like this: my parents are Kashubs and they speak Kashubian but I don’t speak Kashubian, nor am I a Kashub. So you really have to make a conscious decision: yes, I am a Kashub too, because I want to be like my parents, because I am interested, because it is important, because I understand Kashubian.

When someone consciously decides to identify with a minority culture, it takes more than just not renouncing the ancestors’ culture but also accepting some obligations (“I am interested, it is important, I understand”). On this assumption, a minority culture is open to everyone, regardless of their origins. Despite my previous reservations, even the most hermetic of the four cultures investigated in this study, i.e. the culture of Catholic Sorbs, can be subject to identity choices, as the testimony below indicates:

**E17F(S):** First of all, you are born as a Sorb, but you can also decide about it. I know people who say they were born in Sorbian families but then they turn German. [...] But there are also some Germans who learned Sorbian and feel Sorbian. You have

to feel it and then you can think of yourself as Sorbian. But you have to be committed. I don't have respect for people who say, "I'm Sorbian" and the very next day "I'm German." I can't understand it. You have to make a choice. But all this starts at your cradle. It stems from your childhood.

The girl believes that being born in a Sorbian family is not enough because many such people "turn German" (i.e. they make a negative ethnic choice). She does not exclude the possibility that people born in German families can become Sorbian and be identified as Sorbs as long as they show an attitude proving their commitment to the community. Then the Sorbian identity becomes a real choice ("you have to be committed"). On closer scrutiny, the speaker's statement reveals an interesting paradox: despite her initial announcement, the girl contradicts herself towards the end, where she returns to the primordial concept of the Sorbian identity, which has to "start at your cradle." This is largely motivated by her own experience and scarcity of positive examples of "Sorbian converts" around her. Also interesting from this perspective is the testimony from a male Sorb working for an institution involved in the revitalization of the Sorbian language. As he emphasizes, the Sorbian identity was something he naturally absorbed rather than chose, but it also got reinforced when he started to ask himself questions concerning the future of the Sorbian language:

**G25M(S):** It wasn't really a decision in my case, I just grew in this. [...] But possibly I did it too, even though unconsciously, that is I made a choice. [Because] I was thinking about the future of Sorbs, about families in which one partner is Sorbian and the other is not. There are more and more situations like that and, in my opinion, something should be done to introduce Sorbian in such families. Everybody has to make a decision for themselves. We didn't have to.

Those who straddle two cultures to a greater extent (Tschernokoshewa, 1999), i.e. those who were raised in mixed families and identify both with the dominant and the minority culture, or those who are in a relationship with a German partner and have children with them, having to decide about the language of socialization and education for them, face a bigger dilemma. At the same time, young Sorbs realize that the negative identity choice, i.e. choosing a "German" life would deprive them of the community in which they were raised and which provides an important point of reference for them:

**M25F(S):** Well, I could say I didn't feel like it. I could live my own life and keep distance. Perhaps then I wouldn't have visited this place or another or I'd have missed some birthday or some other holiday. I can make my own choice. Everybody is free to decide in favour or against this.

Young people who are engaged in activities promoting a minority culture tend to think about belonging to a cultural community in exclusive terms, with the identity being "either-or" (Šatava, 2005). Surprisingly enough, though, they find their place in today's transcultural world. Their doubts may result from the fear of not

being identified by others as representatives of a minority. An individual's identity is composed of their own classification and other people's perception as a member of a group (cf. Bokszański, 2006). If objective features, such as appearance, are not helpful in categorizing an individual as a member of a group, a decision taken by this individual requires some external manifestation. The most effective way to manifest one's choice is to speak a minority language:

**Z16M(W):** Yes, there is a decision. You need to decide, kind of, am I British or am I Welsh. If you speak more English, you may say you're Welsh, but inside of you, you are more British, and that's how people see you. But if you feel strongly about the Welsh language, you see yourself possibly as more Welsh than British.

According to young people who have taken a positive identity decision, the very manifestation of one's identity is not enough. A conscious membership in a minority culture means acquiring those elements of culture on which the cultural distinctness has been built throughout the years, such as familiarity with history as well as interest and participation in culture. It is of key importance for people who were born outside Wales, hence they have no family or place bonds, so they have to prove their relationship with the minority culture in some way, as this Welsh activist claims:

**E25F(W):** That's kind of a difficult one, because there are for example learners, Welsh learners who moved here from another country, and they say, "I feel Welsh." So I think it is up to a person, people choose how they feel. You know, how they relate to the past, what they know about the past.

The identity choice can be a matter of an individual's decision, but it should not be based on a passing interest. It should involve a feeling of unity with a group based on a common place of living, common interests, common political views, etc. Researchers of present-day ethnicity note that an instrumental motivation for joining a group should not be seen as a calculated plan in which there is no place for bonds between the individual and the group. Arjun Appadurai claims that instrumental motivation, which may be for instance related to the need to consolidate a group, can be so deeply instilled in the collective identity that it becomes natural and works as an effective incentive to take action (Appadurai, 1996: 14–15), as long as it is internalized by individuals driven by this kind of motivation. A young Welsh woman compares identification with a minority culture to gender:

**N22F(W):** It is just how I identify. It's like with gender, it only depends on how you identify yourself. I know people who came here, my friend's partner, he came here from Birmingham but he is learning Welsh, and he identifies himself as Welsh, and he does more for the Welsh language than a lot of people who were born here.

Despite such declarations, young people underscore that those who were not born into a minority culture should prove that they are worthy of it. What is expected of them is some proof of involvement. This is how a young Breton teacher explains to her pupils that they have a right to feel Breton regardless of where they come from:

**A25F(B):** [...] in my class there is a girl [from outside Brittany], and [she] felt rejected by other children who kept saying she wasn't Breton. I told her to take it easy because what matters is if she feels Breton herself. She said she did because she was learning the language, she liked dancing and singing. I said in that case there isn't anyone else in the class who would be more Breton than her. And that really boosted her confidence. Because being Breton isn't in your blood, it is in your head and heart.

In the account of the post-modern world offered by (Giddens, 1990), the ties between time and space have been relaxed and institutions took over from families the duty of socializing children with a (minority) culture. In this world, everyone, regardless of their place of birth, origins, or – to a lesser degree – place of living can consider themselves to be a member of a minority. Young people often stress that identification with the minority culture is their own well-thought-out choice, independent of where they were born, how they were raised or what others think. The following secondary school student from Kashubia started to identify with the ethnic culture thanks to the lessons of Kashubian:

**P19M(K):** In my opinion it is all about identifying with this culture. With the heritage, with where you come from. And you have to reach that awareness by yourself. You can't talk anyone into it. You can't tell anyone: "You are a Kashub because of this, this and that." The point is that that you need to admit this yourself. Before yourself and before others.

Reaching the decision to identify with a minority culture can be a long and difficult process. Especially for those who were raised in assimilated or ethnically indifferent families belonging to what Šatava calls the grey zone of ethnicity. In such cases a young person needs a strong impulse to make a decision. This is what this young Kashubian activist understands by being shown "an alternative path:"

**J21M(K):** I don't think you can reach this decision all by yourself. You have to come across something that will show you this alternative path. [...] But to come across this, there has to be a factor that will evoke this kind of thoughts. [...] it can be a different thing for different people.

Young Bretons likewise emphasize that some external impulse is necessary to spur the reflection on identity dilemmas to make people notice that something like "minority identity" exists. This process can take place at school:

**CC20M(B):** Yes, it was a process. [...] And the fact that my parents had sent me to the Diwan school. It's obvious that this is the foundation of everything else. Because to be able to make a choice, we have to be offered some foundation first. Because if you are not familiar, you don't know that something like this exists, you've never immersed yourself in it... at some point you have to come across this, so that you can say here's an opportunity.

An external stimulus coming from the environment, family, books, participation in cultural events or from one's own reflection upon the world is important for young people, especially those who are in the process of searching for their place and identity. A woman coming from a Kashubian family talks about her search for identity and leaving the grey zone of ethnicity in the following way:

**G25F(K):** I think it was in my secondary school, during the period of soul searching. I started to read a lot of fiction, for example Remus... [...] And it was then when I started to realize that I am a Kashub. I mean I have always been one, it's not that I suddenly decided to be a Kashub, but I started to notice that the legends, stories my grandmas used to tell me were taken from literature, that they hadn't made it all up themselves, that this is our past and heritage.

It is an awareness of the bonds with culture and a sense of belonging to it that constitute the *sine qua non* for acquiring a minority identity. This woman admits that once she started thinking about herself as a part of the Kashubian community, the old stories that she used to see as unrelated to any kind of reality started to make sense as pieces of one puzzle, thanks to which she could discover her heritage. This is what incited her to undertake further actions. Some activists, however, feel that the realization of belonging to a minority may sometimes be too effortless. If not accompanied by any kind of action, it can be even dangerous for a minority. As one Welshman politically involved in the Welsh cause puts it:

**H16M(W):** I think it is too easy to be Welsh today. Anybody can say "I am Welsh." You go to England and people may say, oh yes, I am Welsh. It is easy to say, "I am Welsh." But being Welsh with all these responsibilities of being Welsh, it's not so easy. In my opinion, if you're Welsh, you've got a responsibility to preserve your inheritance, which is the language and the culture, the *eisteddfod*, for your children and the next generation. And it is a responsibility.

A Sorbian secondary school student talks about responsibility and active participation in the minority culture in a similar vein:

**K17M(S):** If somebody says they want to be Sorbian [but does nothing about it], it's like somebody said they want to be Catholic and don't go to church. The point is if they are interested in proving it or not. If somebody considers themselves Sorbian, they have to be actively interested in preserving the language, and not just talk like "I'm a Sorb because my great-grandmothers spoke Sorbian a hundred years ago" – that's not what being Sorbian is about.

Choice, decision, responsibility – these are the most often evoked categories in terms of which young people discuss their minority identity. At the same time, they are aware that there are many identity decisions they have to take during their lifespan, as identity and group membership are not given once and for all. Owing to this, many of my interlocutors refer to yet another crucial issue: the struggle for identity.

## Identification with a minority as a continuous struggle for identity

Struggling, fighting for the culture and striving for recognition are recurrent topics in statements on “how to be a member of a minority culture.” As was mentioned, young people have a strong sense of responsibility for the minority language and its future. This responsibility extends to the minority culture, its preservation and collective identity. The decision to speak in a minority language is not neutral. They feel, however, that choosing their identity forces them to face adverse circumstances resulting from the situation of their group. This is how one Kashub comments on this issue:

**A20M(K):** I don't want to impose anything on anybody, but I believe that when you decide to be a Kashub [...], it's like you enter into a state... I don't know how to put it, our lives become a constant struggle for identity.

What does this “struggle for identity” involve? On the one hand, it means demanding political recognition, without which a group is deprived of any material basis for its existence. On the other, it is also the need to recognize one's own identification with the group in the largely homogenized world. Young people are convinced that one's identity and belonging to a group have to be proved all the time. Despite there being a number of options for identification, the choice of a minority identity is far from obvious, both for people born in minority families and for those who developed fascination with the minority culture and want to be part of it. This choice may be also not noticed or not accepted by the wider society surrounding the minority. But for young people who have taken the decision, their identity is fully conscious, often subject to analysis, also in conversations with others who have made similar decisions. Their identity is constantly being revised due to the changing political, social and cultural context, and due to dominant discourses and changes on the perception of a given group.

Such identity-analysis incites young people to undertake actions for the minority culture cause, which in turn requires effort and constantly proving their worth as members of this culture. This is how one Kashub who returned to his region after university to become an activist sees this problem:

**E25M(K):** [...] It may well be that our grandparents simply inherited all this. And we are trying to save what we got from them so that it does not disappear in today's homogeneous world. That's why perhaps the stakes are higher now. On the other hand, circumstances are now better than before and if we are able to turn the fashion for “Kashubianness” into something more durable, it will all depend on out activity. I mean to continue to be Kashubs, we have to do something about it.

The inherited identity is not essentially different from the chosen identity with respect to the effort an individual has to invest in proving it genuine. As the man says, “to continue to be Kashubs, we have to do something about it,” i.e. to confirm cultural membership and to protect the minority culture, since being aware

of the threat obliges them to take action. Purposeful activities within a group aimed to confirm membership in it are also mentioned by young Bretons, as in the statement below:

**DD16F(B):** Of course you can't be Breton without doing something. People who do nothing for the sake of Breton culture but keep saying that they are Breton, are not really Breton in my opinion. To be Breton you have to join in, participate, do something... first of all you have to create, you have to ... do projects, new projects to... make Breton television, whatever, but really to be Breton you have to do something...

These words of the Breton secondary school student are highly emotional. It is difficult for this teenager to tell exactly what has to be done to be “really Breton,” but it definitely includes broadly understood active involvement in Breton culture. A Welshman who learned Welsh at school is of a similar opinion, emphasizing that there is a continuous struggle between the Welsh identity and the British identity. “Welshness” has to be therefore reaffirmed now and again, as it cannot be taken for granted. To be Welsh, it is necessary to make a choice, and to remain active, as he insists:

**NDR:** *Do you think it is easy to be Welsh today?*

**C21M(W):** No, no, it is not because being Welsh is a battle, you can't just be Welsh. Being Welsh forces you to do something about it. If you are born in America, you are American automatically. Born in France – you are French. If you're born in Wales, it means you are British and not necessarily Welsh. And you need to choose which one you want to be.

It is then clear that, according to my interlocutors, being born at a certain place and in a certain community, which in the past would automatically entail membership in that community and provide answers to such questions as how to live, what to do, what activities to participate in, what to celebrate, which religion to follow is no longer binding for individuals in these respects. Participation in a minority culture has to be, as they claim, problematized. The whole world has to be approached with reflection, since in Giddens' (1990: 38), view “social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character.” In the parlance of my interlocutors, their participation in a minority culture is not “natural,” they have to find their own path to it and to identify themselves through it and against its background. While pondering their membership in a minority culture, they compare themselves with how their parents and grandparents existed within groups and on the basis of this, they draw conclusions about the present times. A Kashubian teacher says:

**I22F(K):** [...] in fact the generations of our parents and grandparents were not so interested, they weren't into studying Kashubian literature or history, etc. they just spoke Kashubian, and it was fine. Those who now start to take an interest in

this culture, they have to do it, so to say, on a higher level. If they realize that they are from here and that they want to be from here, that they want to learn more, they reach for more advanced knowledge, literature and culture, so these people are more aware of all these things.

Following the train of thought presented above, it can be said that the older generations did not have to take an intentional interest in Kashubian culture, which was simply around them. They did not have to prove their ethnic membership, either. They were classified as “us” by their own group and as “them” by other groups. Today, when minority cultures function differently and socialization has been taken over from families and communities by educational and cultural institutions, young people who would like to get closer to or join in a culture have to recognize (or create) their links with this culture and then develop an interest in the group’s history, literature and traditions. This is why, as the Kashubian teacher insists, young people who have taken an identity decision are to a greater extent aware of what minority culture is about and what consequences follow from membership. The following secondary school student from Brittany is also convinced that cultural membership has to be fully conscious. In her view, gaining this kind of awareness is accompanied by understanding the role of language and culture, and ultimately getting engaged in the minority cause:

**B17F(B):** Yes, I think it’s more.... Their attitude is different, because... because they used to ... well, no, it depends ... But yes. For example I know elderly people who were forbidden to speak Breton when they were at school. I think for them the value of the language is different. But they are more inside, in a way. Because they keep speaking Breton, they are in this environment, and we feel an urge to understand, to be aware to what extent we need it.

People born before the cultural turn simply lived in the Breton community, the existence of which was taken for granted. The adolescent says that the Bretons were “more inside” the group, belonging to it in a natural way. Young people, on the other hand, “feel an urge” to get to know the culture and to gain awareness of responsibility for its future – a problem non-existent for the Bretons of previous generations. It is interesting that young people often observe that the older generations who did not have to contribute anything to be considered members of a minority group show lesser attachment or weaker commitment to it. This may be connected with the elderly people’s negative attitude to revitalization and modernization of language and also to the style of young people’s activism. This is what a student of the Kashubian language at university confesses about her family:

**C21F(K):** [...] My grandpa is accustomed to these people, to this land. But still I think he look at this from a different perspective, he was through all these evictions, etc. It seems to me that he could get rid of all this at any time, at least superficially. But it might disappear inside him too.

People who did not transfer the language and ethnic awareness to the subsequent generations are perceived by the young as not holding a strong attachment to the minority identity. Those whose “Kashubianness” was discovered by themselves, on the other hand, are often driven by a certain neophytic zeal and ardently declare this to be their desired way of life – a decision that, not infrequently, is disproven in the future. The following student of the secondary Diwan school shares a similar opinion about the older generations:

**AA16M(B):** [...] old Bretons went through a lot of bad experience when they were kids and Breton was being pushed out by French. And they were quite shocked ... by that, you could say. So their attachment to our culture is not as strong as ours. Because we learned Breton and are now living at the time when we are trying to raise it from its decline. We want everybody to be able to learn and this is a kind of revolution. And they tried very hard not to speak Breton. And sometimes they are absolutely astonished that we do want to speak Breton. Opinions may vary among people, but generally speaking, their attachment to culture is that they just speak Breton among friends.

The line of argument presented by this school student deserves some attention: the oldest-generation Bretons experienced humiliation because of their cultural identity and due to this, they did not transmit the language, as the most important component of that culture, to the next generations. The fact that they could give up their culture is, in the eyes of this student, evidence that their attachment to the culture was weak. He goes on to say that today young people invest tremendous effort in learning the language and they also participate in Breton events, further the “revolution” and show passion for Breton culture. This kind of involvement is often met with criticism on the part of the older generation. The young Breton concludes by saying that the older people’s attachment to Breton culture is only about speaking the language in everyday life. They are passive whereas young people have to actively prove their “Bretonness,” they have to work towards it and nurture it. Here a clash between two attitudes manifests itself again: natural Bretons, who cannot be really accused of not being Bretons, but who do not care for the future of the Breton culture, and Bretons of choice, who struggle for the preservation of the language and culture. Young people reflect much upon the issues such as who can claim to be a real Breton and what are the essential components of “Bretonness.” As regards the passivity of the older generation, young people’s opinions are ambivalent, whereas passivity of their peers who do not show interest in the minority culture is met with overt criticism. The feelings that young Bretons extend towards old people combine admiration for their authenticity with anger oriented towards their passivity and resentment shown to those who are trying to protect the culture. A Welsh secondary school student is also disappointed by his grandparents’ passive stance, as they do not seem to notice that the status and prestige enjoyed by Welsh are changing:

**H16M(W):** Speaking of my grandparents, it doesn't seem like they have the same pride and the burning need to keep the language still alive. Cause they still lived when the Welsh language was looked down upon and forbidden to use, when Welsh had no status. You might think they grew up with the language and therefore they're proud. But it doesn't look like that to me, there is no fire there. Today we grow up listening to our parent's stories about wiping down the signs, being arrested, but them, I don't know.

The teenager's words seem to indicate that the young minority generation, especially in Wales and in Brittany, thinks of cultural membership in terms of the necessity to struggle, as was instilled in them by the tales told by their parents, who instigated language revival movements. This dimension of the minority identity is mentioned in other statements too:

**L20F(W):** I think they didn't have to worry about that, cause it was there for them. I think now you don't hear it [Welsh] as much, maybe. And I think now, it's more of a battle now, rather than it's just there. So for my generation, we are more like we have to battle for it, and we have to look after it. And for my grandparents it was more obvious, I suppose.

The struggle for the language and culture as well as responsibility for their future – these are the two most important aspects of the present-day minority identity. This also involves a specific quasi-political vision, relying on the “expressionistic concept of politics,” as Ulrich Beck (1994: 18) called it following Jürgen Habermas, in which social and political forms are interchangeable. Having a political vision of the minority language and culture does not necessarily mean that this vision is congruent with official policies implemented by institutions. What it means is that the minority identity and its ways of expression have become strongly politicized, and that individuals can voice opinions concerning how this identity can be shaped and sanctioned, even if only in the form of “manufacturing social commitments and obligations, no matter how tentative” (Beck, 1994: 20). Minority culture and participation in it are therefore perceived by young people as different from what it used to be: no longer is it seen as unreflective living an everyday life but as creating awareness of identity and vision of the minority's place in a state and in the world. This is how one Breton university student describes this process:

**CC20M(B):** [...] on the one hand there are those who grew up in the Breton environment, who acquired Breton without making a personal choice about it. Without a political or any other choice. And they are not necessarily oriented toward the future, they don't have any political vision concerning the language. This is a language they grew up with, it's easier for them to use it in some situations, for instance when talking with childhood friends. And this is also a relationship which constitutes a community. [...] But for the young it is different. They are born, like for instance me, in a French environment, and we form a group in which we find our place. This group consists of people who have learned or are learning Breton

and who have some vision of Brittany, together with its language and culture. And if we are speaking Breton, that's because this is our choice.

Comparing the world of Breton native speakers with the world of the young *néo-bretonnants*, the student refers to a “political vision,” which can be understood as conscious activities oriented towards securing the minority status to the Bretons and ensuring rights and developmental opportunities to their language. The older generations living in the Breton-speaking community were, according to this young man, deprived of such a vision.<sup>44</sup> It is only people who invested effort in learning and using the language that think about their participation in minority culture in terms of a task or project. The speaker notes that young engaged Bretons constitute a kind of community too, with the common views and activities being a kind of glue bonding the group together. Such a community differs from that of their grandfathers, but it is still quite distant from a society with purely instrumental motivations of membership.

## Towards a new type of relation

In his book *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Anthony Cohen (1985) observes that community and communal values have been long seen as the opposite of modernity. This radical view seems to be untenable, considering the multitude of extant forms of collective life and the visible need for people to create groups based on direct interactions and strong emotional bonds. Cohen claims that communities did not cease to exist with the onset of modernity, but they changed their character and hence need to be redefined. The critics of the nineteenth-century theories of communal life have also pointed out that present-day communities are no longer based on primordial and direct bonds but on symbolic relations contracted on three planes: place, interests and “communion” understood as “spirit of community” (cf. Lee & Newby, 1983; Willmott, 1986; Crow & Allan, 1994). It is claimed that present-day communities can be created around a place offering common local space, around passion which can bring together individuals who do not share other interests, or around strong arbitrary bonds through which individuals establish sense of joint actions and coexistence. Recalling Frederik Barth's theory of ethnic boundaries, Cohen states that the present-day community is based on two criteria: first, group members “have something in common with each other” and second, there exist features that “distinguish them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups” (Cohen, 1985: 12).

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44 The Breton movement *Emsav* was established in the nineteenth century. The vision of community then, however, was based on living far away from civilization and the influence of other groups, cultures and languages. In a way, this vision was detached from historical reality.

It is interesting to explore the kind of bonds that exist among young people engaged in minority life, who discover their identity (if they come from assimilated families), reaffirm it and decide to manifest it (if they are born in families that valued membership in minority culture), or choose it on the basis of their own needs (if they have had little in common with minority culture before). At first glance these three groups have little in common: they vary with respect to language proficiency, motivations and reasons to use it, and also with respect to identify with the imagined community. Besides, they may not differ in any systematic way from their peers who do not identify with a minority. On closer inspection, however, some common characteristics can be discerned. First of all, they are all young people who have consciously decided to join in minority life and to enhance their encounters with the language and culture (it has to be kept in mind though that only time will tell if this will be a lasting commitment). They were raised or educated within a specific discourse of endangered languages and cultures, the necessity to protect them as well as active involvement in social life. They are united not only by a local context, which may not be identical or equally relevant for all members of a minority, but also by the supranational, especially European context of the functioning of minorities in the twenty-first century. Relations created by young people are therefore multifarious, and their specific characteristics will be the subject of consideration in what follows.

The most fundamental characteristic of young people, and at the same time the essence of their chosen identity or its main symbolic manifestation, is their relation with the minority language. This relation has already been discussed on the level of an individual and the problem I would like to address now is whether – and if so, then to what extent – the minority language and attitude towards it can be treated by young people as a foundation upon which a group tied by emotional bonds is built. It appears that the minority language and stance towards it unites young people regardless of how fluent speakers they are.

First of all, language can provide a foundation upon which a cultural community is based. Such a community can exist only in a region where a minority language is a tool for communication and its speaker know one another. This kind of situation holds in Lusatia, as presented in the testimony below:

**S17F(S):** It's simply the Sorbian community. Everybody knows everybody else, they influence each other. When we are with our parents and they are celebrating birthday or some other occasion, they greet all the people and so on. It isn't like this in other parts [of Lusatia]. There people know each other inside villages, but not outside. It holds people together.

The Catholic Upper Lusatia is exceptional in that the area inhabited by Sorbian speakers participating in Sorbian rituals is small so that the relations among them resemble those characterizing a traditional community. Other territorial and language communities can take different forms. The feeling of a bond among speakers of Welsh is described by a Welsh student in the following way:

**J19F(W):** [...] It is one thing about Wales that it is one big community, with many smaller communities inside. And I think all Welsh-speakers are a part of this community. And there is one thing about being a Welsh-speaker. If you are Welsh speaking, you will find your community, and you are welcome there.

The sense in which the young woman uses the word “community” deserves some attention. She says that all Welsh-speakers belong to “one big community,” which seems to be an imagined community rather than a set of local communities based on direct interactions. People belonging to this “big community” feel connected to others who speak the language and they feel “welcome.” This kind of community can be thought of as a “community of attachment,” based on two types of relations: direct interactions and sense of identity. As Peter Willmott (1989: 12) puts it: “If people see themselves as sharing membership with others [...] this helps them, even in the absence of any personal relationship with their fellows, to locate themselves in the wider social structure, and to make sense of their lives in what may otherwise seem a complex and anonymous world.”

My interlocutors typically identify with an imagined community, which provides an important point of reference for them and in the cause of which they become engaged. Of greater importance, however, are relations existing in reality, especially if they are based on attachment to a minority language. In order to identify such groups, it may be worthwhile to find out something about the life of people identifying with a minority language. A female Kashub working in the Kashubian speaking media but not formally associated with any organization says what follows:

**H24F(K):** [...] I think I could divide the Kashubian community into two subgroups. One of them is those who grew in Kashubian families, like my friends who speak or at least understand Kashubian, they are from nearby villages [...]. And the other group, which is official and active [...], those who are engaged, who live and breathe the Kashubian language. The rural Kashubs don't seem to have an awareness... or maybe they do, but they speak Kashubian not because they believe they are obliged to. It's just natural, somewhere in their heads, and nobody ponders it.

For a local community, the language is one of the elements of social life, intertwined with other elements such as neighbourhood, growing up together, common topics of conversations and activities. Created purposefully, the society of activists also pivots on speaking the language but for them it is a manifestation and a driving force behind involvement in the minority cause. The Kashubian language providing the foundation of the two groups is not the same language for each of them, both in formal and in ideological terms. Even though each of the groups is based on its own concept of language, they are all united together on the level of imagined community by the very idea of sharing this language.

Various types of groups based on speaking a language or other relations to it are discussed by this Welsh activist, who learned Welsh at school:

**R20M(W):** [At a birthday party in North Wales] there were about a hundred people there, and they all could speak Welsh. And they were speaking Welsh to each other for the whole evening. I've never seen anything like that before because I am from Cardiff, I am not used to something like that. And I felt it was just pride, pride of seeing everybody speaking in the Welsh language. [...] Nobody switched into English, they were speaking Welsh fluently, like they do all their life. And I there I felt that pride. [...] It's not like the *eisteddfod* where Welsh language speakers gather together, and you know they all speak Welsh already. But it was that family thing, they were all speaking Welsh, and that's a unique thing.

One group consists of Welsh speaking people living in a small locality in North Wales. All of them are linked by family, neighbourhood or social ties (they are at a birthday party). Speaking Welsh unites them since this is their language of communication. The youngster coming from South Wales had never come across this kind of language community before. As a learner of Welsh and an activist he has participated in *eisteddfod*, a Welsh culture festival (see the next chapter for details), during which everybody speaks Welsh regardless how fluent they are – an unspoken rule that every participant of this festival follows. *Eisteddfod* participants are joined together not only by speaking the language but also by the feeling of taking part in a common project for the sake of Wales and its heritage. The bonds originating among them are therefore different from those present in a local Welsh community.

The division discussed by the young people appertains to their lives, the institutionalization of the minority culture and frameworks for its functioning. It can be noted that in one type of group, which can be referred to as communal, the language functions in a natural and at the same time unreflective way. Members of such groups are united by local rather than language identity.<sup>45</sup> In the case of groups united by an idea, such as speaking a minority language, relations have to be created. It would not be appropriate, however, to refer to these relations as societal since such the relational potential of groups can by far exceed performing an instrumentally defined task. Another difference between the two kinds of groups concerns the possibility and ways of combining them. A local community cannot be entered easily; it takes time before a potential new member is accepted by other group members as one of them. Individuals belonging to the other type of group share some ideals, values or interests, related to the issue of fundamental importance, i.e. the minority language not only “bridging” individuals within a group, but also “bonding” them by facilitating joint actions, to use Robert Putnam's (2000) metaphor. Despite the fact that joining this group is easier, not everyone can be accepted as a member. The decisive factor here is not birth and upbringing but being accepted by other members. As David Lee and Howard Newby (1983: 57)

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45 People who are not speakers of the language can also belong to such groups by virtue of being in close relationships with other members.

observe, living side by side does not necessarily mean that neighbours have a lot in common. There may not be any interactions between them, as it is not physical proximity but the nature of human relationships that is the most important aspect of community. This is what a Kashubian activist says about such differences:

**J21M(K):** Yes, that's something completely different. Because when you're among your own people every day and you share interests and views with them, everything is very close and similar. But when you only live next door but know nothing about these people, it's really hard to talk about anything. I started speaking Kashubian with these people when I decided that my literary variety of Kashubian was good enough. And then I started to say some casual things to them, but you know – just short utterances and things.

This Kashub's testimony takes up the issue of conducting conversations in the minority language with representatives of the two groups. His words are significant in that they show that living in a village and being raised next to certain people does not guarantee any attachment to them. The man says that he does not feel connected to his neighbours in the village, locating his emotions and seeking connection to people with whom he shares interests and views. The Kashubian language, however, is a key opening the doors to both groups, i.e. not only to the social group built upon the common cause but also to the local community, with whom the speaker initially exchanges "short utterances."

Speaking a minority language in interactions with others is often considered to be a sufficient condition for creating a bond, especially with people of similar age, who may have gone through similar experience with the language. A woman born in a Kashubian-speaking family voices the following opinion:

**O24F(K):** When I talk to my friends in Kashubian, very often I forget that we come from different places. In a way I forget that I met them at university, not when we were kids. I treat these friends automatically as my childhood friends. [...] Or it seems to me like I've known them much longer than I really have.

This can be interpreted as meaning the Kashubian speakers are united by the feeling of belonging to one local community, regardless of the real geographical distance between them. This local community comprises similar memories, experience and a common code affording a sense of closeness. This kind of proximity through language can also be achieved, albeit in a different way, among people who have learned or acquired a minority language as the second one. This young woman who learned Kashubian at university and is not yet a fluent speaker, claims that the very fact of using Kashubian makes people feel closer:

**H24F(K):** Yes, it seems to me ... relations get closer with those people with whom I speak Kashubian. [...] the Kashubian language breaks the ice in various situations. Because we are from the same home.

The metaphor of "home" describing relations among Kashubian-speaking people is quite remarkable here, as it evokes common origins and close family ties. A young

Breton who went to an immersion school sees the influence of a common minority language on the perception of newly met people in the following way:

**H20M(B):** As far as friends are concerned, it doesn't matter if someone speaks Breton or not. But if I don't know somebody and for instance I meet them in a bar and I can hear this person speak Breton, that creates some kind of trust in me.

Those who are learning a minority language and are interested in improving their competence, and most of all, they want to be engaged in actions promoting the language and culture naturally seek the company of people who have the same interests, passions and needs. Such a group for whom using a minority language and protecting it is not considered weird can offer valuable support and reassure a person that their identity decision was right. This is what a Welshman says about creating a group of this kind:

**C21M(W):** I have my friends from the same community to speak Welsh with anyway. So I found out who can speak Welsh and then we became a group of friends. So we created our own social network. We use the Welsh language, we hang around together, we go to the same club in our town weekly, where we know we can use Welsh. So we make an effort, make sure we take an active part in the Welsh life of our community. To know who we are. You can pass a Welsh-speaking person on the street, but you never know if this person is Welsh or not. So we try to network each other, so we know who's who.

This testimony indicates that a group based on using a minority language has two major functions. The first is purely social – young people who speak the same language meet, enjoy spending time together or have parties, which is conducive to creating friendships, possibly getting closer with time. The other is about delineating the group boundaries and membership: Welsh speakers do not form a group unless they initiate direct interactions. The Welshman says he found out who speaks Welsh in his locality and, as he puts it, they “became a group of friends.” The leap from being strangers to a close relationship is rapid. Many learners of a minority language, especially new speakers of these languages, recall that thanks to their familiarity with the language, their relations with its users were immediately set in a certain perspective bringing people close together. This is what a young female Breton says:

**A25F(B):** The internship I mentioned, it was the first one for adults organized for people from all over Brittany. [...] There were only Breton-speaking people. I can't explain that feeling but we came there and it happened. Everybody said hello and chatted to everybody else. It's much easier for us to approach another Breton-speaking person because we know from the very start that we share something. Such common things obviously attract people. These common things are not visible. In a place where everybody speaks Breton, we are happy mostly because we can speak only Breton. [...] here we feel like a group. [...] we feel stronger when we are together, when we are with other Breton-speaking people.

This woman expresses the view that people using a minority language (here all of them have learned Breton, although to a different level of proficiency and in different circumstances) find it easy to network with other speakers of this language because as she says, “we know from the very start that we share something.” And what they share is not confined to a common language, even though the language provides an initial incentive to start relationships. It also includes common experience of learning a language situated in a specific social and political position. She does not say that all Breton speakers are connected, instead she insists that “in a place where everybody speaks Breton [...] we feel like a group,” i.e. in a place where people meet for a specific purpose related to involvement in minority culture. It is thus not only the language but actions concerning it that have the bonding effect.

In the past, Rennes was not a Breton-speaking town but it has become an important centre of Breton culture. It is a seat of many institutions dealing with culture and language policies of Brittany, attracting many learners of the language and students. There are a few places where Breton-speaking people meet, so when I was beginning my research stay at the University of Rennes, I was told the names of places where I should go to look for people who matched the profile of my interviewee. Indeed, I soon became a regular visitor to three bars, being an informal centre of the Breton-speaking world in Rennes. It was due to my interest, a positive attitude towards the language and willingness to learn it that was quickly accepted by people with whom I could talk and who helped me enter the environment of Breton-speaking inhabitants of the town. A student of Breton talks about one of these bars in the following way:

**R21M(B):** [...] there aren't many people who speak Breton and that's one of the reasons why we feel close. And we became close friends fast. Like in this bar. When you hear someone speak Breton, you start talking to them and it can go on for hours. You keep talking and you don't even look at your watch. Then you exchange phone numbers, you meet next week and you become pals [...]. So when you hear someone speak Breton, you start a conversation immediately. This is how friendships start.

The minority language becomes an impulse to get to know the person speaking. Since in the circles of young people this language is invariably related to specific topics of conversation, those who speak Breton refer to mutually familiar places, people, opinions or interests, which further boosts their proximity. People who have engaged their time, energy and emotional involvement into the minority cause meet others, for whom this is also important, so they all feel naturally connected. As the Kashubian activist admits:

**C21F(K):** [...] when I accidentally meet someone in some strange place and this person knows something and is interested, or simply speaks Kashubian, I'm simply delighted and I focus all my attention on that person.

Young people believe that such relationships start easily because familiarity with the minority language evokes an instinctive sentiment causing strangers to feel

close to each other. The affinity of interests, discovered gradually as the conversation unfolds, is also of great importance.

Many people consciously involved in a minority language also share views on the world. There are therefore many possibilities of reaching mutual understanding. According to this young Kashub, Kashubian-speakers feel emotionally connected:

**A20M(K):** There is an emotional bond. If you can hear someone speak Kashubian, you immediately get closer to this person. And we are united by common views, the fact that we can trust each other and talk about various things, including opinions, and we know we won't be laughed at or misunderstood. These relations are much closer.

In this activists' opinion, all people with a passion for Kashubian and especially those who decided to learn it and use it as their first language are united by common views. Despite the fact that Kashubian activists belong to various groups, which are often markedly distinct or even conflicted – something this man is fully aware of, as he himself is engaged in this conflict – there are still groups based on close ties and there are even more potential communities. Territorial factors are of lesser importance since such communities can comprise members who meet only during especially organized events. What matters is involvement in the common cause, as the Breton activist intimates:

**K21F(B):** Nowadays many young people come from over the world [so] I'm not sure if the feeling of belonging to a specific place is really strong. I would say yes, thinking about my friends and my environment but ... for us it is so because we are in *Ai'Ta*, we have friends there, or in other associations. All of us are very much engaged. When an interesting [Breton] play is on in the theatre, we all go see it.

This woman differentiates between those united by joint actions (being members of one association, participating in the same cultural, social or political events), and those united by nothing more than living in the same region. Young people born and raised in the (post)modern world feel that they are united with other people speaking the minority language, participating in the minority culture and sharing similar interests by means of bonds that may turn into communal relations as long as people subscribing to these values are given opportunities to meet each other in person.