

## Chapter 7: Towards activism

In the previous chapter, we examined different types of cultural practice which bring young people together to create groups which can be described as communities (rooted in practice or interests, or virtual communities). We saw how young people form and maintain bonds that allow them to absorb the cultural content of the minority culture. The process means that young people build communities with their peers and start constructing their (individual and communal) identities in relation to the minority culture and its healthy functioning.

This chapter, in turn, examines the complicated process of young people becoming involved in the broadly-understood minority culture – from becoming interested in it, gradually immersing themselves in it, to conscious activism within it. We will also examine different strategies of young people's linguistic and cultural activism and their expectations of what activism is. I suggest looking at minority culture and participation in it from the perspective of young people who, having been brought up at the boundary of the dominant and minority cultures and frequently coming from families which are assimilated in terms of language and culture, gradually discover their minority culture and find their place within it to be able to consciously and actively participate in its promotion and later protection. Research shows that young generations, regardless of their education opportunities, tend to identify with the minority culture to a lesser degree or not at all. There are many reasons for this: the progressing globalization of cultural content and opportunities for development and action mean that today all young people have so many choices of how to lead their lives and what to participate in that it takes a complex combination of events, motivation and personality traits for them to become involved with their minority culture and language. As such, young people's interest in and engagement with the minority culture are frequently directly influenced by specific events, individuals and activities which allow them to perceive the minority culture as their own, one they want to identify with. Therefore, becoming actively involved with a minority culture is frequently linked with young people's engagement with culture in general.

### Participation in minority culture

In order to define young people's participation in minority culture, we must first examine what this culture is and step beyond dominant patterns of cultural participation, in favour of having representatives of the given community reaching for existing or even creating new cultural resources.<sup>56</sup> This understanding of cultural

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56 I was inspired by the activities and publications prepared at the Section for Cultural Animation, Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw (cf. Godlewski et al., 2002; *Teraz! Animacja kultury*) and reflections in theoretical works by Marek

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participation assumes that actions are created and taken deliberately; however, it does not account for the phenomenon of existing in culture as an integral part of participating in it.

Participation in culture is generally studied by statistical analysis of consumption: how often, where and when do residents of a given region make use of the resources of cultural institutions such as cinemas, theatres, cultural centres, museums and music groups. Some statistics also include amateur cultural activities such as theatres and concerts (cf. Morrone, 2006; Eurostat, 2011). Defined this way, participation can be understood as “participation in artistic culture created as part of institutional popularization activities” (Grad, 1997: 5). Antonina Kłoskowska’s sociology papers (1972; 1981) describe different ways of perceiving cultural participation, albeit with a similar undertone. She describes it as manipulation of semi-otic cultural resources by creating, experiencing and interpreting their messages. A third concept, the one most widely accepted in Poland, was formulated by the sociologist Andrzej Tyszka, who wrote that cultural participation means “[...] individual participation in cultural phenomena – assimilating their content, using their resources, following their norms and standards – as well as creating new values and reproducing and processing existing ones” (Tyszka, 1971: 122). As Marek Krajewski puts it (2013: 42): “The common feature of this understanding of cultural participation is treating culture as something external to individuals; something they manipulate, use, consume to meet their needs, which in turn decides who they are in the social sense, their place within social structures, and how near or far they are from the ideal of ‘cultural individuals’ as defined in their community.” This definition of cultural participation does not include individuals subconsciously following the standards and influences of the culture they were born and brought up and in which they function as a factor shaping sensitivity, the way of perceiving the world and values important both on individual and social levels.

Although, as Krajewski rightly notes, a rigid understanding of cultural participation does not fit in with how the contemporary world works, when I asked my interlocutors to describe themselves as representatives of the minority culture, they generally started from just this format: they talked about bands they belong or have belonged to, any instruments they play and the kinds of organized activities supporting the minority culture they participate in. Of course this framing of their stories is understandable; they have been brought up seeing minority culture as something quite separate from their daily lives, therefore something which should noticeably stand out from their usual activities. However, as soon as they gain some distance from the question and describe their family history and attitude to the minority culture and learning the language, and talk about their daily lives, their depiction of how they “exist in culture” starts resembling

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Krajewski, whose text “*W kierunku relacyjnej koncepcji uczestnictwa w kulturze*” [Towards a relational concept of participation in culture] I use as a reference point for the dominant concepts of cultural participation (Krajewski, 2013).

live cultural participation as defined by Wojciech Burszta (2011: 11) as “the sphere of practices which includes rather than excluding, activates rather than teaching, becomes a true reality rather than occasional celebration.” My reflections on this way of being in a culture, the influence of landscapes, climate, childhood games and language use (not necessarily in terms of minority vs. majority language) on how individual personalities are shaped, and on what can be described as culture in the anthropological sense (cf. Mencwel, 2006; 42–45), arose mainly when I asked my interlocutors whether there was a point in their lives when they realized that minority culture exists as separate from majority culture. According to this young man from Kashubia:

**J21M(K):** I suppose at home we didn't have this idea that we stressed that something was Kashubian, ours. [...] But there were many natural things. Except we didn't realize we were doing them. We saw them as ours, rather than Kashubian or Polish. Just ours. That's how things are and that's it. [...] But my younger sister... lots has changed now, many customs have disappeared, and I see that they are no longer there, but then people do them automatically, by themselves. Because when they were children they saw us doing it and they are repeating it. I try to not say to them that it's Kashubian, only that it's ours. When you know that something is yours, then maybe you don't do it so consciously, but you tend to pass it on. And this affects the vitality of this culture.

Being and participating in Kashubian culture involves not just taking part in organized cultural events, but also engaging in a range of cultural practices such as rituals, feasts and ceremonies, food and spending time together, all of which my interlocutor describes as “natural” elements forming a part of his life. He states that he only realized that they belong to “Kashubian culture” when he was preparing a school presentation on Kashubian customs. This young woman from Brittany who has been singing *kan ha discan* at a local *fest-noz* since childhood also says she was conscious of taking part in the minority culture:

**U25F(B):** [...] we sing at lots of small events in the region. When we were younger, we did it all the time, just for fun [...], now we sing less frequently, usually when *fest-noz* is held for an important reason, to support a Breton association...

She says when she and her sisters were children, after each performance they joined with other celebrations, danced or ran among adults “as kids do.” It's only now that she is an adult she steps onto the stage with a specific aim: to support other people's activities promoting Breton culture. She seemed very surprised by my question whether she thinks that singing at a *fest-noz* is a kind of engagement:

**U25F(B):** [...] for me, *fest-noz* is not a cultural activity. [laughs] Singing, dancing, drinking beer at *fest-noz*, well... [laughs].

Singing at *fest-noz* is regarded as local practice, as experiencing life in a community. Framed this way, cultural participation is simply a daily custom rather than a specially organized event one may but does not have to attend. Krajewski

describes this way of seeing culture as relational, in which “culture is the effect of the binding of various elements in a collective and a factor describing the course of the process. [...] it is not a thing, or a collection of things, but a property of links creating a defined community, their specific configuration. It regulates our behaviour [...] because it is a specific system of elements bound into a community” (Krajewski, 2013: 37).

According to some of my interlocutors, it is also possible to participate in culture consciously or subconsciously. Asked to explain what she means by this, a young Sorbian woman says:

**O21F(S):** [...] subconsciously, [when] someone thinks: I like dancing, so I'll join a dance group. But the [dance] group wears costumes, Evangelical or Catholic, it's something Sorbian. So I think that it is subconscious that by joining such a group the person supports tradition and culture and follows customs.

Singing, dancing and participating in an organized cultural group can be interpreted on two levels. Deliberate participation in minority culture means taking part in certain activities because they are an inherent part of that culture. “Living Sorbian culture” subconsciously means joining friends in favourite activities which may, coincidentally, be attributed to the canon of the minority culture by outsiders. However, this distinction does not matter to young people in their daily lives. What's important is being active, having fun and interacting with others, which has an indirect impact on shaping their identities and values. It can be said, then, that culture and participation in culture is something which defines and shapes people belonging to certain communities and distinguishes them from other groups. In this sense, minority culture is not and should not be seen as a range of spectacles and activities which are deliberately associated with what minority culture is supposed to be. Just like all others, minority culture is a living thing which evolves as all its components change and evolve. One does not step into minority culture briefly, only to exit it again. Minority culture is something lived every day, even though in many dimensions it overlaps with other cultures, especially the dominant culture with which it is in constant contact.

Describing activities in rural regions in Poland, Tomasz Rakowski has written that by finding grounds for developing culture and cultural competences in a vision of modernization, rural culture is perceived through a prism of deficiency, immaturity and scarcity. As such, participation in culture is understood as behaviour lauded from the perspective of urban culture (Rakowski, 2013: 9). Similar phenomena are observed in minority cultures. Ways of thinking about participation in those cultures are not so much about conveying information and values generated by them but about forcing young people into existing, socially acceptable dominant standards which are financed top-down. As Rakowski writes, “this conceals a danger of imposing this version of creativity as a common value, almost a common standard, which in practice can mean enforcing language use and a certain ‘discursive violence.’ More than anything, however, it can cause a lot of damage even earlier – from the very start it can obliterate everything which is present in these

communities, such as their own, local competences and ‘grassroot creativities’ [...]” (Rakowski, 2013: 9). The fact is that they seem to be important for the endurance and cohesion of minority communities and they shape their identities. The problem is that only certain ideas, including those suggested by young people, will be approved by the relevant institutions and thus gain financial support. Any approved activities must now be categorized as “projects.” This limits the creativity of representatives of minorities to fit within existing frameworks. But this is not the only dimension of acting within culture which is dangerous for minorities. Just as damaging is the pursuit of customs believed to be traditional in the minority, but which had never actually been practiced by the local community. A young Kashubian woman describes this problem, which puts off many young people from participating in minority culture which no longer feels like their own:

**H24F(K):** For example, no one had ever seen or heard of any “beheading the kite”<sup>57</sup> here. Now it turns out it’s an old Kashubian custom, and it has to happen at all village events.

Standardizing minority cultures by homogenizing their local differences, used as a strategy of creating a culture everyone can identify with, means that it no longer functions in everyday life but turns into regulated spectacles. In the next chapter, I will explore how problematic it is for young people to treat participation in minority culture in selected, consumption-driven categories which impose a division between what “can be regarded” as a minority culture and what “doesn’t fit in.”

My interlocutors, people from minority cultures, are not simply spectators of the culture or perhaps its creators. Most importantly, they are its participants. This is why I am interested in how, by being in the culture and becoming increasingly aware of it, they themselves perceive it and how their actions affect how it evolves. At the same time, their (minority) identity is shaped and changed as part of the process. As such, I am interested in participation in culture which requires an active attitude, open to interactions with the surroundings and other members of the community, to experiences and to creating new values. I wrote earlier about the existence of an ethnic “grey zone” which includes individuals from minority cultures who deliberately do not identify with them and who declare that they do not consider their survival important. This means that not all individuals born and living as part of a minority culture are active participants in it, even if they attend language lessons or go on organized trips. Visiting a museum with a group of students may have very little to do with active participation in culture, and instead is simply an encounter with some limited elements of the culture. However, engaging in conversation with artists/curators/animations who not only present certain objects but encourage visitors to interact inspires personal reflection or

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57 A Kashubian midsummer folk custom involving a ritual beheading of a kite, a bird once regarded as a symbol of evil in the region.

experience; it turns into participation because it requires active and emotional participation through contact with other people rather than simply looking at art. This young woman talks about her participation in Kashubian culture:

**G25F(K):** [...] I remember when I was little [...] the custom of beheading the kite was always important in the village. Today the Kashubian element has gone a bit, although Masses are still held in Kashubian and people speak [Kashubian] at them, but this whole setting... When I was little, [...] we always waited for it impatiently, all kids, because we walked [from one place to another] and it was a kind of pageant. Because everyone from the village walked in this pageant behind a horse-drawn cart. Everyone was wearing something colourful, girls had garlands. [...] And we sang a lot of Kashubian songs. And the same reason for setting garlands down the river, but also a bonfire... And people trumpeted in the four directions of the compass. And everyone always took part. I couldn't have imagined not going to these events.

Children taking part in local customs were active participants in them. Preparations, participation and later recalling the event shaped their identities, their view of the world and how they formed community bonds. By becoming active participants in interpersonal, artistic, promotional and cultural events, young people enter “into interaction under the circumstances of working and creating together,” which in turn allows them to “eradicate authoritarian hierarchies and eliminate all-knowing attitudes and distinctions between teachers and students” (Piwowska, no date: 30). All participants co-create the spectacle which at the same time strengthens their relationships and common identity. This understanding of cultural participation applies to promotional activities which require engagement from participants, and this engagement turns them into creators and conscious contributors. This way of existing in a minority culture – regardless whether it is spontaneously cultivated by families or peer groups or initiated by local cultural promoters, teachers or young people themselves – has the most powerful influence over young people and it is frequently the first stage along their way of becoming engaged with minority activities.

## Early stages of engagement

Joan Pujolar, a scholar of the Catalan language and its speakers, adopted the Catalan word *mudes* as a term denoting changes in social performance. Pujolar focuses on linguistic *mudes* – important biographical junctures, when an individual takes a conscious (to a varying degree) decision to change their linguistic repertoire in favour of the minority language. For participants in his study, these turning-points included the time of starting primary and secondary school and university, entering the job market, getting married and having children (Pujolar & Puigdevall, 2015: 167). Language choices and identification with a minority culture become “life investments with open meanings” since they are performative acts which bear long-term social consequences which are constantly being negotiated

by users of the language and communities around them (Pujolar & Puigdevall, 2015: 169). Choosing a language and realizing the desire to identify with a minority culture brings specific changes to young people's lives. More than anything, they gradually become active members of the given community and start identifying more strongly with it by participating in its culture at various levels. However, this awareness does not mean a change in their attitude towards the dominant culture or lead them to become active campaigners for the minority culture. Joan Pujolar and Isaac González (2012) go as far as to posit that speaking minority languages and participating in minority cultures has today become "de-ethnicized" as a result of political, economic and social changes.<sup>58</sup> Observing young people learning at immersive or bilingual schools, or taking part in activities specific to minority cultures, reveals that identity shaped this way is rarely expressed as activism which requires making specific life decisions. The identities of participants in minority cultures are therefore highly diverse, as is the way and degree of their participation. However, discovering one's roots, history of the community and activities typical of it and one's own place within the community affects how individuals perceive themselves and others in the context of this culture. Change is particularly noticeable if participation in minority culture goes hand in hand with learning the language, especially when the young person starts speaking the minority language. It also forms an additional "linguistic persona" which can interact with other speakers of the minority language and take part in certain communal practices. Pujolar and Puigdevall (2015: 172) wrote: "[...] mobilising a specific linguistic or discursive competence in social life cannot be interpreted as a simple, abstract, cognitive exercise. Instead it should be seen as a form of positioning, the production of a social persona that claims a specific discursive position that is open to recognition or contestation." This attitude is less pronounced in participation in minority culture, although individuals who immerse themselves in activities and discourse surrounding the culture develop a wide range of new practices, inspirations and behaviours which in turn affect how they perceive their place in the world and the specific community.

The important biographic junctures experienced by my interlocutors, i.e. the moments in life that have determined how they engage with their own culture and language, are of course on a different scale than those described by the above-cited scholars of Catalan. This is mainly because I work with young people who are yet to

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58 "De-ethnicization" of a minority language largely depends on the socio-political context in which the language functions. In Catalonia, linguistic rights of individuals using the minority language have a long tradition, and many children attend schools where teaching is delivered in Catalan. Others learn the language during extracurricular classes. Catalan also functions in public life. However, the languages I am examining in this study have not attained this status; this even applies to Welsh. This is why using them is a far more significant act of self-identification, which means they have not undergone the process of de-ethnicization.

experience those junctures in their lives, even though changing schools or starting university can be highly significant, since they involve meeting new people. The cultural *mudes* discussed below have been indicated by my interlocutors. I did not ask them directly about what they felt were important moments in their lives from the perspective of their linguistic and cultural awareness; rather, these answers emerged from their narratives about their own lives and activities within the cultural minority. As such, these “moments” are not simply discrete events. They also concern the surroundings, practices and individuals who had a major impact on my interlocutors. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (1992: 124) write: “Human action is not an instantaneous reaction to immediate stimuli, and the slightest ‘reaction’ of an individual to another is pregnant with the whole history of these persons and of their relationship.” This is why stimuli to become engaged have many forms: some may have been inspired by their circles at certain stages of their lives to experience something which would clearly and consciously steer them towards the minority culture. According to young people, entering the world of the minority culture opened the field for further activities, which in turn piqued their interest further and fostered their engagement. The *mudes* I list are typological, allowing me to rank broader, more complex and interlinked phenomena.

Young people entering the world of a minority culture resembles other socialization processes. Analysing attitudes of “young people in the new world,” Hanna Świda-Ziemba dedicates one of her chapters to young activists in Poland (Świda-Ziemba, 2005: 165–204). According to her and her students’ research, the most significant – although not determining – influence on their engagement comes from their environment and family traditions, participating in and organizing activities from a young age, as well as (or perhaps more than anything) having a community bound by strong emotional ties. Stories by young minority language activists paint a similar picture.

## Parents

The first reference point for young people is their family home. It is where they are socialized; it is values and practices learned at home that shape their social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and which they will reproduce in the future. Parental attitudes towards belonging to an ethnic group and minority language have a major influence on which attitudes are adopted or rejected by young people (Baker, 1992: 109). Parents transmit an interest in minority culture and attitudes towards practices involved with participating in it. This student of Sorbian studies explains his attitude towards his culture:

**B22M(S):** I grew up with it. Our dad was always telling us where things are in Lusatia. We always went to different places to look at everything. Whenever a commemorative plaque was unveiled in a village, we were there. I really think it’s good that we did it. I am grateful for it. For years, every Christmas we were given Sorbian

books. We got them whether we wanted them or not. And then we read them. Our parents paid close attention that we did.

This young man grew up in a minority language-speaking home, and his parents' engagement meant that he learned about his environment and its history, participated in official and unofficial celebrations involving the minority culture, and learned to be an active spectator of cultural content.

Research shows that young people growing up in homes where community and civic issues are discussed, whose parents are engaged with the community or show positive aspects of participation, are more interested and have a greater tendency to become involved (McIntosh & Youniss, 2010: 31). For language minorities, these signals are of two types. It could involve being brought up in the minority language and parents speaking it with each other, their children and within the community. It could also involve an attitude of being open to the minority language, even if it isn't the main communication tool within the family, such as sending children to language schools and activities and showing them the language is valued. This helps children become familiar with the language and the minority group's situation and find a space for themselves within it. This has been the case for this 25-year-old Sorb, who became involved with a local educational institution after graduating from university:

**GM25M(S):** My mother was teaching Sorbian. She also participated in Sorbian courses in Bautzen. My dad plays in a Sorbian amateur theatre group. It is important for our family. My parents did not have to work hard to make us, the children, speak Sorbian and participate in Sorbian culture. We were brought up that way. It was the only obvious way.

For the following young woman, the daughter of a Kashubian activist, it is clear that if it were not for her mother, a teacher and activist for the language and region, she would not have learned Kashubian, like most of her peers:

**NDR:** *Has your mum's engagement helped you discover various things to do with Kashubia?*

**B24F(K):** Yes, definitely. Because there aren't many people like me, who spoke Kashubian at home and where the links to the region were stressed, I am talking about people roughly my age, they don't tend to feel very close ties to the region.

When parents participate in cultural, political and social activities supporting the minority, children find it easier to become interested in those issues (Rochon, 1998: 161). Simply by joining in and taking on the responsibilities of being a part of a group means that young people enter minority life more strongly, because individuals learn and construct their identities through group participation (McIntosh & Youniss, 2010: 30). This was the case for the following young Breton, who – despite his tender age – runs and organizes many Breton cultural events in his local community, as well as participating in public debates on the situation in Brittany and its language:

**T16M(B):** I discovered these circles kind of by accident, because my dad plays the bagpipes. Once [...] I insisted, went with him and started play the bagpipes. And so, step by step I was included in the band, I joined the association, and once you're in an association like that you want to do as much as you can, help organize festivals and so on. And gradually become involved in cultural life.

Parental attitudes are even more strongly reflected when it comes to civic and/or political engagement. For many young people, values and practices gained at the family home play a formative role, bolstering their engagement and stimulating them to action (Sherrod, 2006: 14). Research shows that key values held by parents are frequently transferred to the next generation. This is especially clear for parents who are or have been activists, because they are more likely to teach their children the importance of understanding others and of serving the common good (cf. Franz & McClelland, 1994). A young man active in *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* and in the youth division of *Plaid Cymru* says:

**B20M(W):** I think [my engagement] started because of my uncle. He was very sensitive to this because he was actually arrested in the 1980s for protesting for a better status of the Welsh language. And he spent some time in jail. So, it passed onto me through family more than anything. [...] I think I was just born in it, it developed in me with time. It's always been there since I was little. Everyone wears *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* t-shirts, stickers... It was always there. I just accepted it even before I actually understood why. But when you get older you really start to accept what is behind *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* and you want to defend the Welsh language and you want the best for Wales.

This student describes his uncle as someone very close to him, as well as being something of a hero – a standard to be followed. The family treats the fight for Welsh rights as a civic duty. As he grew up in this atmosphere and started to understand what the struggle is for and why, he decided to become active himself.

The following Breton secondary school student, whose father, a former activist with the Brittany Liberation Front (FLB),<sup>59</sup> taught his son about Breton issues, has similar views about the need to protect Breton culture and language:

**G16M(B):** I talked to my dad about it a bit, and he said, "Look, it's a fight for our language." That was during a demonstration in Rennes. He said: "I am going, because this is my country and it's the right thing to do." And he also said that I am his son, so I will go with him, take part in it, to be able to decide for myself in the future. But whenever he talked about it, my dad tried not to get into political problems. [...] he always tried to direct me more towards cultural issues, the language and learning to speak Breton. And he wanted me to learn about our past

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59 *Front de la libération de la Bretagne* is an organization with a terrorist slant, demanding that Brittany be granted independence, which was especially active in the 1970s. It is entirely rejected by the majority of Breton movements.

and our ancestors as much as possible, rather than getting me involved with politics straight away. But I also remember that he told me once that politics is really important in Brittany, and even when we often didn't have time, he tried to introduce me to various issues.

The family home transmits the most important values tied with culture and minority language, and a positive attitude to them. However, showing and conveying an active attitude towards the world around them to children also plays an important role. If they are to become engaged with the culture and language, young people must have a sense that their engagement is important and that they are able to create culture themselves.

## School

We have already touched upon the role played by schools in the process of helping young people make a conscious choice to enter language and cultural communities. The significance of school activities is greater for children who do not speak the minority language at home and whose families do not discuss issues concerning cultural identity. However, school education is also important for children brought up in closely-knit language communities. Young people form important friendships and relationships at school, and they join social groups and communities of practice some of which help them (re)define their linguistic and cultural identities (Jaffe, 2011: 206). Schools foster language competence, in particular those in the literary language (cf. Martin-Jones, 2011). They also teach important cultural skills, especially during various kinds of extracurricular activities, which help young people learn about and become interested in minority issues. They can join other students to create communities of practice, which allows them to gain knowledge through action; the learning process becomes a process of gaining awareness of cultural belonging and becoming members of a given group (Lave, 1991; Eckert & Wenger, 1994). I spoke to a young Sorbian woman brought up in a Sorbian-speaking family whose parents are involved in cultural activities:

**H25F(S):** [...] first of all, school gives access. You can take part in activities with your friends. At the Upper Sorbian Grammar School, there is easy access to various opportunities. [...] For example we have performed at a theatre and it was great. We performed our play many times – sometimes in Sorbian, sometimes in German. We were proud and it was great fun. I think that it improved our [cultural] awareness.

Through activities enabling young people to form communities of practice involving Sorbian, the school helps students form closer ties and improve their understanding of the importance of Sorbian issues. Naturally, schools can encourage and discourage young people in equal measure. As stated in Chapter 2, a lot depends on individual teachers and the attractiveness of the activities on offer. This young woman explains that if it were not for her Kashubian language teacher,

she would have been unlikely to centre her life around activities promoting the language:

**G25F(K):** [...] if not for my secondary school, I wouldn't even know how to write in Kashubian. Because you know, at home, we spoke Kashubian, but then my parents cannot write in this language at all [...]. Also, taking part in performances [of an amateur theatre run by Kashubian teacher] enabled me to get know Kashubian literature. [...] You know, during regular classes there is never enough time to learn everything. But while preparing for a performance you need to get familiar with the writer – the author, and the whole context in which a story, a tale, or a drama has been created.

It was the school's theatre club which introduced her to Kashubian works, and encouraged her to participate in Kashubian culture and work with others to promote it. These activities changed how she looks at the minority culture and helped her form bonds with other students taking part in performances. The theatre club at school was a community of practice, with participation leading to the formation of a common identity through common engagement (Eckert & Wenger, 1994: 2).

Additionally, at school young people can learn about what situation their language and culture are in and why. Awareness of this situation, especially when it is transmitted by a teacher involved in minority issues, can influence young people's interest in the issues and lead to them become engaged with activities supporting the group. A young man from South Wales whose family did not speak Welsh at home, even though one of his parents was involved with Welsh politics, says:

**R20M(W):** Yes, it started in secondary school. It was not the curriculum really, it was the teachers who wanted to introduce us... cause in Wales the teachers are quite independent of government, and they can choose their own curriculum. We've learnt about the history of Wales and the conflict with English people. We've learnt about the Welsh speaking Wales, and I really wanted to see it, how it is outside. Outside because when you are in Cardiff... Still 20 years ago there were not many people who could speak Welsh. Now more people speak Welsh on the streets. It was definitely in school that it started, it wasn't a family thing. And since then I got involved in stuff like *Plaid Cymru* and *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*.

We cannot overlook the role played by schools involved with the minority language movement, such as Diwan in Brittany; its functioning and influence on shaping young people's collective consciousness and engagement in issues faced by their minority was discussed in Chapter 6.

## Cultural activities

Not all kinds of activities involved with minority culture bring similar effects. When participation can be passive and imitative, it does not drive the individual's engagement. However, it can be based on active and creative participation, which

promotes individual self-realization (Godlewski, 2002: 63–64). This type of participation can lead to individuals joining groups, forming bonds and becoming engaged. Based on long-term studies conducted in London, Mirza Munira (2006: 104) says: “Any number of sociable or educational activities, for instance, in sport or education or community work, might be more effective in building social capital or addressing social exclusion.” By joining cultural activities and practice, young people form bonds and learn as well as gaining social and cultural capital. Extracurricular activities at schools also encourage young people to form communities of practice which provide further opportunities to learn the language, develop community skills, share practices and shape identities in relation to those groups (Wenger, 1998). Research shows that participation in performative activities which require young people to engage with and give something of themselves plays a crucial role in how young people choose their future lifestyles and shape their identities; they learn new things and develop their abilities, including creativity, teamworking, improvisation and flexibility, all of which are essential in adulthood. They also gain the most important skill for engagement with minority life: motivation (Miles et al., 2002: 3).

Such participation also has a real effect on the desire and ability to use the minority language (Artexa Sarasola, 2014): young people find pleasure and sense in speaking the minority language, as well as practicing using it in environments other than home and school, which are frequently not associated with the language. A student of Welsh who did not grow up speaking Welsh at home says:

**D20F(W):** I wouldn't say there is that much of a difference [concerning language competence]. It's about the attitudes towards the language really. Some people just used the Welsh language without even thinking about it, and others had to think about using it really. It depended on what you did in school. If you did a lot of extracurricular activities, like preparing different things for *Eisteddfod*, a lot of people did something connected with sport and some were involved in drama... they could speak a lot more Welsh, they got used to it. And those people who didn't get involved had a lot of difficulties to speak.

She stresses that at school where the majority of students learned Welsh, those of them who used it as a communication tool within a group focused around cultural events started identifying with it more quickly.

Young people join extracurricular activities either because their parents suggest it or because they decide to do something their peers are doing. Regardless of the initial motivation, the positive experiences and new friendships can lead to independent and deliberate participation in minority culture. This young Sorbian woman explains:

**F20F(S):** I saw other girls being *družki* [participants of a Catholic procession, wearing a traditional costume] and I wanted to do the same. My cousin performed at a Sorbian theatre so I decided that I would also join. He showed me that it's something beautiful. I don't know, it seemed obvious that I was involved. Some friends

were doing something and I liked it, I also wanted to do it. I joined the orchestra by myself. I knew myself that I wanted to do it.

Initially, this young woman copied her peers and wanted to do the same things. However, her participation in Sorbian cultural life gradually became a conscious choice.

Organizations offering cultural activities and efforts of communities encouraging young people to join them have a common goal: the individual development of young people as members of a broader group by active participation and engagement (Speer, 2008: 214). Hosting cultural events which sneak in elements of the minority language or history make young people sensitive to those issues. The following student of Breton, from a family which does not speak the language and is not involved with the minority, recalls that her first contact with Breton culture happened at dance classes in a Celtic club:

**V22F(B):** [...] [...] When I was a child, after-school activities were one hour and half long. We danced for one hour and then there was “half an hour for culture.” People who taught us how to dance, young girls, gave us a talk about Brittany, history, stories, taught us a few words in Breton, some silly things, colours, etc.... It was short but very interesting and it allowed us to understand that it is not only for amusement, like judo or sport, but it was related to something important.

Being a member of a youth cultural group is mainly a social experience. By taking part in such events, young people have the opportunity to make new acquaintances and friends and learn about new values, at times different from those they experience at home. Such relationships give sense to bonds and enhance a sense of belonging to a community (Cotterell, 2007: 223). Peer relationships are significant for young people, since it is important that they fit in and do not stick out of the group (Miles, Dallas & Burr, 1998). Trends and pastimes are not trivial issues; rather, they provide an important context for how young people make key decisions concerning their futures. “The demands on young people which arise from youth cultural involvement are twofold: they have to orientate themselves in the landscape of lifestyles that surround them, creating and occupying a niche they consider to be integrative as well as individual” (Miles et al., 2002: 17). Cooperation between group members becomes the greatest challenge for participants, since it helps them build further interest in the community’s goals, while learning those goals and identifying with them supports and justifies individual sense of belonging (McInstosh & Youniss, 2010: 31). Robert Putnam (2000: 117) also shows that those individuals who “belong to formal and informal social networks are more likely to give [their] time and money to good causes than those [...] who are isolated socially.” Young people gain a sense that they are doing something they enjoy and something which is important for the group as a whole, which in turn makes them more inclined to give more of themselves for the common goals. They also have an opportunity to meet individuals who may encourage them to join in

with more organized activities. A young Kashub describes the early stage of his interests:

**N22M(K):** [...] it started when [...] I joined a folkloric dance group, quite by chance. We performed different Kashubian events and it was where I had my first contact with Kashubian, because unfortunately we didn't speak Kashubian at home. In secondary school [...] we joined [...] the biggest regional ensemble of song and dance. And I am still a part of it. Everything went OK, we had a lot of performances, even abroad, and our self-confidence grew, our pride of being Kashubs. [...] And there I met a girl who was already in the Students Club Pomorania and she said, "You have to join the Pomorania Club." So I did.

His story is as important as it is typical. Participating in cultural events allowed him to make an early distinction between the minority and dominant cultures, and start learning the language which he did not speak at home. By joining the group he met peers who went on to become friends; the close ties between them were in part based on the growing pride in belonging to the minority culture. He also met a Kashubian activist who led him to taking the next step in engagement in minority issues.

### Friends, activists

As the work of scholars such as Jacqueline Kennelly has shown, engaged individuals from families with no ties to activism frequently admit that their first impulse for becoming involved was developing relationships with other young people who played the role of their "cultural guides" in the world of activism (Kennelly, 2011: 117–118). Researchers of social movements also note the importance of networks between individuals and engaged people who introduce them to the relevant circles (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). It is contact with engaged individuals which is quoted by my interlocutors as one of the most important stimuli for full and deliberate engagement in minority language and culture issues. This student of Breton, active in numerous Breton organizations and syndicates, says that he became "seriously involved" thanks to his brother who introduced him to his circle of activists:

**W20M(B):** It seems to me that it was in [Diwan] secondary school when I started to think about acting on behalf of the Breton language. But my activity took concrete form after I left secondary school. When I finished secondary school, my brother was finishing his BA in economics at Nantes and was beginning to be involved with *44 Breizh*<sup>60</sup> with people I knew, but not too well. That's when I first heard about it, and when I left secondary school, I joined *44 Breizh* and it was probably

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60 Association campaigning for the Loire-Atlantique department to join Brittany.

my first real commitment. [...] That's when I started to work in the specific sense of the word.

Research shows that people whose friends include many activists are much more likely to become activists themselves (Hart & Lakin Gullan, 2010: 73). Simply the presence of active individuals in a peer group can influence others. "Even if it does not result in bringing in new recruits to a cause, activism may raise awareness of issues and expand imagination" (Kassimir, 2006: 23). However, frequently exchanges of ideas, views or personal experience helping young people gain an understanding of activism are enough to stimulate them to become more engaged and opens new, fascinating options of becoming involved (Sherrod et al., 2006: 463). This teenager from Wales who has become active recently recalls how this started:

**Y16F(W):** I have a friend, and we spoke a lot about it [involvement for the Welsh language], and we are both members of *Cymdeithas*. And he's already been going to meetings, and he invited me to go to meetings. And since then I've been looking at different opportunities [...] I made friends with many people. I've become informed, I read Welsh papers, as much as I can see. I am looking for local events.

This young activist's words confirm that peer groups, their views and attitudes can influence interest in minority culture and language issues. Colin Baker believes that participation in minority activities, events and groups can bolster a positive attitude towards the language (Baker, 1992: 109). The experience of this young Kashubian activist who organizes cultural activities to try to recruit new members to the cause is interesting in this context:

**A20M(K):** [...] for me it's definitely a success to have recruited a few people who are now involved with my theatre group. We formed a Kashubian-language theatre group, enrolling people who are already involved with the Kashubian movement. But there weren't many of them, so we invited a few others who [...] already had some stage experience and just had to learn the lines in Kashubian. It was an interesting experience for them [...] and [our] attitude infected them, and we were really able to recruit a few people to our cause.

Another young Sorbian woman was drawn into becoming active in Sorbian culture by a friend who was already engaged. Although she took part in rural Sorbian customs, she had previously shied away from "organized" forms of Sorbian culture. She joined them because of her friend, and she realized that this participation is important for the preservation of her sense of being Sorbian:

**A18F(S):** I have a very good friend who is heavily engaged. She has this ability to motivate people. And she does a lot for young people from the village. There are mainly boys, and she's one of just three girls. [...] She's something of a mother among them. She tries to introduce them to Sorbian culture. Every now and again she organizes trips to Sorbian theatres for performances in Sorbian. When *Pawk* was organizing a Sorbian festival, she said: "Come on, we'll go." [...] She wants

young people to do things which are truly Sorbian. She was my inspiration. Now I say to myself: "Right, let's go to the theatre..."

## Chance/coincidence

Engagement with minority culture activities can begin (and often begins) by chance, combined with a certain grounding provided by family, school or peers. At times it's a question of being in the right place at the right time. This teenager recalls the beginnings of his adventure with the Welsh movement which he is now strongly involved with:

**NDR:** *And how did you join Cymdeithas yr Iaith?*

**W18M(W):** They kind of started the band for us, really, cause... the four of us had been going around pubs and stuff. And then I got a phone call from someone asking if we'd be interested in having a gig. And I thought, "all right then, let's make this a proper band now." Before then, we'd been singing a lot in English, and in Welsh. And then we decided, "all right, let's do it properly in Welsh." It was a great opportunity, and we thought it was a fantastic start for us. And it was a big day for *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*, the 50th birthday, and around this, it was a really good start.

The early stages of engagement with the minority culture can also be combined with a desire to "dazzle"; to do something special to make the most of it. At times this motivation turns into a genuine interest and a gradual shift to the world of activism. The following young man from Kashubia tells his story:

**A20M(K):** This interest stemmed from the fact that I was a good at civic studies and the teacher was looking for volunteers to enter a competition of Kashubian knowledge. I went along thinking about getting a grade rather than any other reason, but I became interested in it. Because until then I only associated being Kashubian with the family home, visiting my aunt occasionally where they speak with a slightly different accent, and that every week there's ten or twenty minutes on the TV on Sundays and grandad watches it. That was all that being Kashubian meant to me. And then it suddenly turned out that we have our whole history [...] And I got so interested in it all that I decided to learn the language.

Another Kashubian secondary-school student tells a similar story about her early interest and later active participation in culture. Her activities were initially motivated by money: a group of young people decided that they would raise more funds if they performed in Kashubian than in Polish. It slowly dawned on them that their performances were not just enjoyed by the local community, but that they were seen as important. After a while, they came to understand this significance:

**T18F(K):** To start with, it was: let's get changed, we'll earn a bit of cash, do some singing... So I said, if you sing in Polish and there are five other groups before you, they'll bung you 50 grosz and no one will appreciate it. So we decided that we'd get

changed, sing in Kashubian, and when we did that, people stopped and watched. And when we started playing and singing carols [in Kashubian], they started singing the second verse. And so on. Then some people would say we haven't been over there yet, and why should another street miss out... And in the end, we had to go all over [the village]. Then other villages joined in which belong [to our district]. And everyone liked it. Then we realized ourselves why it's so important.

My interlocutors frequently describe how they shifted gradually from low-key activities, when they didn't have to consider the entire cultural context, to organizing their own activities with a deliberate focus on the minority language and culture. This young Breton woman says that her involvement started with her love of dance and attending *fest-noz* where she met a group of Breton activist which she gradually joined:

**K21F(B):** During holidays I went to many *fest-noz*, and one was organised by the *Ai'Ta* collective. The collective fights for Breton to be an official language. I went along, signed up, gave my address and that's how it started. Then I spoke to a few people from the collective, there was a campaign, we went, I met people and that was the start. Then I became involved as much as time, place and other things allowed. I really wanted to join in.

Participation in *fest-noz* is an expression of cultural belonging, but it does not have to mean being an active supporter of the culture. However, it provides opportunities to meet people who are actively engaged and who can direct an undecided individual towards becoming involved.

This was the case for this young Sorbian woman who was a member of a dance group, so to some extent she already participated in organised Sorbian culture. Her active participation in culture started from being asked by an experienced animator to help in organizing Sorbian cultural events for children:

**E17F(S):** Because I am in a dance group and there are three of us from the same village, we were asked if we could help [organise activities for young children]. We said we could and then met to talk about who could do what. It took a while, but it was great telling kids about [customs] and then doing them together with them. [...] It gives a lot of joy. We meet, talk and then sing Sorbian songs.

To start with, preparing activities for children meant fulfilling the activist's request. However, the young woman gradually discovered that she enjoys it and that she is good at it. The next step was joining the *Pawk* youth association.

## Finding one's own place

The individuals quoted above started off by enjoying being active within the minority culture and language so much that they started getting more involved. However, this engagement would not have been possible had they not found something personal in those activities which they enjoyed, helped them develop and

which they wanted to pursue. This young Sorbian woman who has been involved with a youth organization since secondary school recalls:

**H25F(S):** What happened was that [friends] talked me into it. After my first YEN<sup>61</sup> seminar, [...] I got “promoted” relatively quickly in the youth group. Then this moved to *Pawk*, because I enjoyed organizing things. I enjoyed working with the group, experiencing things. I could say that I already had visions and plans when I was at this seminar. I was proud that I was enthusiastic and that I also had ideas.

Her first experience of active participation in minority culture was sufficiently positive to encourage her to become further involved. Very frequently the stimuli discussed above overlap, giving the young person a good grounding for becoming involved.

A particularly interesting example is provided by a young Welsh woman who acquired a passion for politics at home. She participated in Welsh cultural life, which she enjoyed. Through her interests she met slightly older friends; she was fascinated by them, and they increasingly involved her in direct action. When she started university, she found a space for herself and started becoming involved in minority activities by herself:

**N22F(W):** My dad, he is quite a political one, he was organizing lots of things to support Welsh. I went there with him. And during *Eisteddfod*, always doing something with *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*, I always wanted it, me and my cousins, we were always there when we were 13–14. So it was always there. And then I went for meetings in North Wales. I remember when my friends got arrested when I was 16. I was disappointed that they did not ask me to do the thing with them, but I was proud of them. You connect with people, and then you get more involved, you go for meetings and stuff. But when I came down to South Wales, I found the *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* office, and I specifically wanted to participate in meetings and things, and here I really got involved.

## Parting from family and location

Young people from families practicing the minority culture frequently see their grandparents as the proper carriers of the culture, given that they have lived, as they say themselves, in “true minority culture.” They become models for young people to emulate; symbols of how the minority culture should function. This is why many of my interlocutors, including this student of Sorbian studies, believe it was being close to grandparents that set them on their path:

**P22M(S):** Yes, I think that my grandmother had the greatest influence on it [...]. I visited regularly to bring her coal, or wood to burn in the stove. We often talked,

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61 Youth of European Nationalities.

and she was really pleased that someone came to visit [...]. She awoke a Sorbian consciousness in me, because she wore a folk costume and somehow, I don't really know how, but I felt that I want to do it.

As individuals close to their grandparents grow up, they start to understand the stories about their minority culture and the sometimes difficult and traumatic experiences that stem from belonging to it. When such stories fall on fertile ground, they can bring about a shift in young people's value systems and push them towards becoming actively involved with minority issues. This young Breton activist describes an event which had a major impact on her:

**K21F(B):** [...] when I saw my grandfather crying for the first time in my life. My grandfather had a fairly difficult life, he went to war, he was captured by Germans, he was at a concentration camp, but he was a strong person. I had never seen him cry, he was always optimistic that everything would be all right, that life would return to normal. But one time, when he was talking to my father about Brittany and told him that when he was little people laughed at him when he spoke Breton... My grandfather didn't usually say much about what he thought. He never cried, and didn't really get wound up. I don't really know how to describe it. And one day he was talking and said that he won't die until Brittany found its way... that he would give his life for his language and for his nation... and then, saying that, he had tears in his eyes [...] And when I saw my grandfather crying like that, it really moved me.

Her grandfather's stories meant that the young woman started seeing her involvement with her language as a task she should take on. For many young people, their grandparents and their stories become a reference point for their own activities which they dedicate to them. This young Kashub describes his engagement:

**K22M(K):** [what I do is a kind of] testament to my grandparents. That's how I see it. [...] It was great when for Kashubian flag celebrations [...] I prepared a talk in Kashubian, it was my first report in Kashubian, on Kashubian topics [...] and my mum's siblings saw it, they said, "It's a shame his grandparents didn't live long enough to see their grandson being so active, because it must be a great source of pride in heaven for them." Man, such small words, but they really encouraged me, showed that what I do is really great and I feel great doing it.

This young Sorbian woman expresses a similar sentiment about her devotion to her grandfather and listening to his stories when she was a child:

**E17F(S):** My grandfather, my mum's father, was very active in Sorbian culture. When he was dying, the most important thing to him was that we should continue in the same direction. He was my favourite grandfather. He was someone special, he always talked about what he used to do, talked about Sorbian culture. I sat on his knee, and he talked to me. He really guided me in this direction.

For many young people, the most traumatic event which encourages them to become involved in the minority culture is the death of a grandmother or grandfather they were close to. This young man from Wales describes how the passing of his grandfather who taught him Welsh motivated him:

**A20M(W):** I was very close to my grandfather. [...] When my grandmother passed away, I lived with my grandfather because we did not want him to be alone, and I was still close to home. My grandfather was Welsh, he couldn't speak much English, and when he got old he did not speak English at all. [...] He told me a lot of stories, a lot of stories of his past... And then he suddenly passed away, and it was quite a shock for me. And I started to see that without the language, without this connection I'd lose these stories that my grandfather used to say. [...] I think it was because seeing how his generation, the last generation whose main language always has been Welsh passing away, and my generation is not that strong [in language] as my grandfather's generation. And I think it was the realization that "this is actually a problem." And that's what kicked me to do it.

Individuals can also become aware of their ties with a minority culture and language as a result of becoming separated from that culture. Young people frequently regard participation in minority culture (and speaking the minority language) as something imposed on them by authorities such as family or school. When using the minority language is not their choice, it can drive resentment and objection, erasing any perceived benefits of belonging to the minority. Many young people say that it was not until they left the family home, school and the surroundings where they grew up that they started to realise how much they miss them and how much they treasure their multiculturalism and bilingualism. This young Breton activist says that she became involved in supporting Breton culture and language after returning from university in a different part of France:

**N23F(B):** There were lots of small things which made me get back to it. But it's also because I left, I went to Bordeaux, I met other people. I have a feeling that it was a path I was following step by step, not necessarily realizing it. But the path was taking me to the place of my origin. I could probably choose something else just as easily, but every time I was drawn back to things which were linked with culture, with language, with things I have in my heart.

For the following young Kashubian woman, who learned the language in secondary school and started participating in Kashubian cultural life, choosing to study a subject unrelated to Kashubia meant that she came to realize what her greatest passion is. By becoming separated from Kashubian culture, she rediscovered what she enjoys in life and what she would like to dedicate herself to in the future:

**C21F(K):** Later [...] I enrolled at the Maritime Academy in Gdynia. And I realised pretty quickly that it isn't something I want to do with my life. Of course I passed exams in maths, physics, and Kashubian was something extra, for me... And really [later no one] had to convince me that I should do Kashubian studies. I quit the

Maritime Academy after the first semester and [...] I was really doing a lot: apart from working [in Kashubian circles], I was expanding my knowledge and travelled a lot [around Kashubia] and discovered lots of great places.

## Becoming involved with preservation of the minority language

Some young people admit that they only realised at some point in their lives that they started to understand the sense of what had been conveyed to them at home or at school concerning the minority culture, its situation and protection. This young Breton woman who graduated from a Diwan secondary school describes how understanding her teachers came as a real revelation:

**M21F(B):** [...] I clearly remember this demonstration I went to with my parents, my whole family and friends. And I think I experienced a revelation [*prise de conscience*]. I mean, I realized that there is really something important in this, after all you can't see Breton on plaques, on signs... And I understood that since there are so many people here today, there must be a reason. [...] after that, every time I was out in town, I noticed that Breton is invisible and it's a shame... and [...] after that I knew that I want to go to the [Diwan] secondary school.

Sometimes a deeper interest in minority issues and becoming involved with them starts from a choice made to a lesser or greater conscious degree which seemingly does not require engagement: choosing what to study or what job to take. However, it turns out that the choice entails joining a certain group and becoming familiar with its burning problems. This student of Sorbian studies at the University of Leipzig says that before starting university she did not consider becoming active in the minority circles:

**I22F(S):** Well actually, I started to get involved when I came to Leipzig and joined *Sorabija*. And I decided to consciously do something when I enrolled in Sorbian studies. From the moment I started my studies, I became that way: I want to do something with others, or look at what others were doing [for Sorbian culture].

Her slightly older colleague took an even longer route:

**G25M(S):** To be honest, [I first became interested in Sorbian] when I started my apprenticeship [at a Sorbian organization] three years ago. Until then I only had a vague idea what the [Witaj] Language Centre is, what Domowina does, but I only knew that they worked on maintaining Sorbian culture. Now I fight for it myself.

Joining a group tied to the minority encourages young people to analyse and adapt their attitude towards the language and culture and improve their understanding; more than anything, it helps them find their own place among activists. The process can be linked to the phenomenon of situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation, described by Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger (1991). During socialization processes, individuals who initially do not engage and who rarely participate

in communal activities gradually become more involved to become genuine, fully-fledged members of the community. This member of Pomorania explains how she did not think of herself in terms of being Kashubian prior to joining the club:

**NDR:** [...] *So your more conscious participation in Kashubian culture began with the Pomorania club?*

**D22F(K):** I think so. Because previously it was only that I had Kashubian friends I recognized that they were Kashubs, and I also have a family from Kashubia. And that's it. And for me to become more involved, it started only after I joined the club. Now it is an important part of my life.

One of my interlocutors described her first interest in Kashubian culture as “catching a bug.” Once that happens, the individual can enter the next stage of minority awareness: becoming engaged in activities supporting it.

## Engagement

Active participation in minority culture allows young people to learn about and understand their environment, as well as helping them realize that it constitutes an important value without which their own lives and their communities would be deprived. Additionally, interactions with animators and activists promoting the minority culture may lead people who have become interested in the culture to develop predispositions such as “ability to self-organize and act without encouragement from the state/government, awareness of the community’s needs and goals, and ability to act for the common good” (Litwinowicz, no date: 23). The combination of individuals noticing the value of minority culture and wanting to show it off turns into engagement.

Psychologists note an important dimension of engagement: it covers targeted action, which is not instrumental in terms of the objective. Objectives (such as protection/revitalization of endangered languages) are simply an excuse to continue ongoing activities rather than an overall goal (Lewicka, 1993: 17–19). As such, engagement is action driven by action; by all external factors and internal experiences which makes individuals take and maintain a certain course of action despite obstacles and attractive alternatives which might otherwise encourage them to abandon their activities (Brickman, 1987).

Examining the stimuli that encourage young people to become engaged with the minority language and culture reveals that they have varying motivations and ways of being involved, and each individual chooses a way of engaging that suits them. The definitions of engagement have also changed over time. The French sociologist Olivier Bobineau (2010: 66–67) stated that in the early 20th century, engagement mainly had connotations of family and community, attesting common bonds and interests (Fr. *l'engagement attestataire*). In late 1968, engagement was directed against “paternal morality,” making into a contention (Fr. *l'engagement contestataire*). The generation of activists born during the 1980s focuses on developing a range of axiological strategies alongside people they consider to be similar

(Fr. *l'engagement confinitaire*). The contesting engagement of the 1960s and 1970s has evolved into voluntary engagement, based on similarities between individuals and passions they share. This kind of engagement is based around the existence of “emotional community” (Maffesoli, 1996), resulting from people’s need to identify emotionally with others. The existence of such communities means that individuals brought up in an atomized world are able to join others in action. Such groups or communities of practice give individuals a sense of value of their activities and engagement, and they shape, confirm and bolster individual identity.

Many scholars and activists working with minorities believe that the greatest problem and challenge in activating young people today is the multitude of choices and opportunities available to them. This is because actively supporting a minority culture requires time, dedication and passion. Unless they are directed towards this interest, young people must share these resources among other activities. This young Welsh activist notes that if a group includes at least one charismatic individual convinced that they are acting for a good cause, they can motivate other individuals who have previously been undecided:

**E16F(W):** [...] students are quite difficult because their free time is so short, and they have exams, and holidays and there is so much going on. And it is very difficult to get them to, you know, sit down and do anything else in their lives, but... it depends on the group as well. If you have one or two people, who are really keen and willing to get all their friends together, then you do see a lot of people doing things. But there are also some years when there is almost no one to do it.

Her observations concern the role played by communities of practice; by participating in them, young people become engaged with the minority culture. According to many of my interlocutors, it is the community dimension and acting towards a specific if distant goal that marks the strength of their engagement. This young Sorbian woman who went from participating in groups, via devising and implementing projects for young people, to working in a minority organization, states that it is impossible to be a member of such a group and remain indifferent. This is because an engaged person is surrounded by other engaged individuals who all motivate one another:

**M25F(S):** When there is someone who is interested in similar things and has similar goals [it is easier to get involved]. All members of these groups [are like that] – I do not know anyone who says, “I’m in a dance group, for example, but I don’t care about anything else.” I can’t imagine saying something like that, one thing rules out the other.

Studies of individuals engaged with various kinds of student movements reveal that one of the factors that motivates them to take action is joining certain communities and becoming involved through formal and informal networks, which help them express feelings and give them a sense of group solidarity. This shifts their perspective from an individual to community perspective. “The choices that are rational for an individual in an atomized environment are not necessarily the

decisions reached by someone in an environment rich in organizational networks and group solidarities” (Rochon, 1998: 96–97). It seems that the greatest benefit of young people becoming engaged with minority languages and cultures is creating community identities of activists. Those who become deeply involved with the group frequently imagine that everyone around them shares their views, which often give them a false impression of the language community as a whole and the problem it faces:

**S17F(S):** Everyone has a way of becoming involved [in being active]. Whether it’s really conscious or as something additional, you simply have to do something, go to events and support it this way. That’s why I could say that we act as Sorbs ... There are also people who don’t belong to these [circles], but generally speaking I think we all know each other, all these choirs and dance groups. And you always hear about someone or other. You basically don’t know anyone who isn’t engaged.

This means that engagement has a social dimension which is enjoyable in and of itself (meeting friends and doing things together), as well as involving activities explained by an overarching goal. It is the influence of social and peer groups on individuals becoming engaged with causes that makes communities of practice formed by young people, discussed in the previous chapter, so important. Engagement is easier between people who share interests and activities. Simply sharing a location, such as student accommodation, school or a music group, does not mean the individual is engaged. If they do not want to interact and do not find their own place in the group’s activities, they may remain passive. However, the existence of this environment helps individuals realize that engagement can have social and communal aspects. According to this student from Wales:

**B20M(W):** [...] living in Pantycelyn you have to make sacrifices, you have to take an active part. You’re not going to become a part of a Pantycelyn community if you don’t attempt to be. You have to take an active part in it.

Relationships between engaged individuals can be viewed from the perspective of social networks, where groups, associations or organizations are seen as social structures based on ties between individuals and the group as a whole. For individuals, social benefits of group participation are gaining many new friends, as well as developing relationships with adults who have loose ties to the group, such as animators, teachers, activists or politicians; the latter is frequently applied by young people in their adult lives (Cotterell, 2007: 228–229). The existence of the group means that when an individual finds themselves in a new environment, they find it easier to find their own place, get a job or join in with interesting activities. This young Kashubian journalist explains:

**V20M(K):** The Kashubian world offers endless opportunities to journalists, because we immediately gain access to the media where we can have great specializations, ones we are interested in, and it seems that the career path is much faster. [...] once you are in the Kashubian world, it suddenly turns out that you know one

employer and another, because they are all active in Kashubian spheres, meet, suddenly everyone is friends, because after all you are a Kashub, so even if there are some differences in worldview, you can meet and talk, and that's a good thing. [...] Once you work your way into the Kashubian world, you are never alone. And that's also beautiful.

This is not simply about the measurable benefits (finding a job, subsidized holidays, participating in projects) accessible to individuals engaged with active communities. It is more that each subsequent engagement, job or holiday with other interested and engaged people mean the individual becomes more strongly involved with the minority. This is because the shaping of common identity as part of participation is at the core of communities of practice. The idea of identity based on participation is, in turn, strongly tied to the concept of motivation, since the significance given to the world by individuals is linked to their activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 122). This makes engaged individuals feel they have their own place in the world. This young Breton man who graduated from a Diwan secondary school and is active in Breton-language groups in Rennes says:

**NDR:** *What does participation in those meetings give you, in your life?*

**J21M(B):** It gives me identity. At least I know... I told you before about the students who didn't ever fight for anything, for any cause. Me, I fought for Breton. My parents were sensitive about environmental issues. I used to demonstrate also for that cause. This is important for the identity to have things you want to defend. The fact that I speak Breton also distinguishes me from others. And it taught me to fight for something important and to know that you have to do it.

The existence of communities of practice allows individuals who have been separated from their environment for some reason to find one another; additionally, they can find and follow a purpose through the group's defined goals and by working with others, since active participation in a group leads to the development of practical skills (Rochon, 1998: 136). The story of this young Kashubian woman is a good example:

**I22F(K):** When I went to university, I didn't like it at all, I didn't like anything about Gdańsk, and I wanted to come home. And it was really thanks to Pomorania that I opened up again. Because everyone [at university] seemed so smart. Meanwhile I'm from a village, I don't know anything and I keep saying this *jo* [Kashubian for "yes"]. [...] It wasn't until I became active in Pomorania, [...] that I opened up and I remembered that I like doing this. I enjoy organizing things, I like when I have a lot of duties and I do them, because then I feel cool and needed. So with Pomorania it isn't just so that we're there because we are on some mission. Pomorania also teaches us ordinary things, being open to others, social skills, it teaches courage.

There is another important dimension of communities of practice of young people from language minorities. Joining such a group, especially in areas where traditional language communities do not exist, when people who speak the minority

language are surrounded by a majority using the dominant culture, motivates individuals to act and provides them with a space where they can use the minority language. This young Kashub who started learning the language as a teenager says:

**NDR:** *Did the existence of this group of friends help you to begin learning Kashubian?*

**V20M(K):** It did not just help – it enabled me to do it. Enabled. If not for the young people with whom I had some sort of a connection, if not for friendships or acquaintances, I wouldn't have joined it, because language and culture are social skills. This is either a communication tool or a way of expressing values that unite us. I don't feel any connection with the elderly. Or, to put it differently: there are few areas where I feel connected with them. And if not for the young people who were thinking in a similar way, who shared my passions or even views on some issues, I would have never entered the Kashubian culture. Because there would not have been anybody with whom I could do it.

This young Breton woman who organizes meetings for young speakers of Breton and encourages them to interact by creating a space to meet and participate in activities describes her own involvement:

**K21F(B):** [...] had I not met people who also spoke Breton, who felt the same as I do, I don't know whether I would be doing all this all on my own. Perhaps a bit, but not all that much. And it's true that meeting people, especially from the *Ai'Ta* collective... since then I have met other young people who also speak Breton. I mean I knew them before, but it wasn't until then that we started speaking Breton in this normal, everyday way.

## Activism

Todd Gitlin, sociologist and American social activist of the 1960s, defines an activist as “someone who moves people into action and doesn't just rouse them for a particular occasion, who doesn't come and go but steadily works up strategies, focuses energies and (crucially) settles in for the long haul” (Gitlin, 2003: 4). Scholars of language activism and the participation of linguists in it describe the phenomenon thus: “Activism is frequently defined as intentional, vigorous or energetic action that individuals and groups practice it to bring about a desired goal. For some, activism is a theoretically or ideologically focused project intended to affect a perceived need for political or social change” (Combs & Penfield, 2012: 461). In minority communities which generally have no public institutions and political leverage (or they exist but are weak), the decisive role falls on activists who develop strategies, focus their attention on specific issues of exclusion, discrimination and a lack of interest in minority problems and goals, and urge other people to become engaged through direct action (Gitlin, 2003; Combs & Penfield, 2012: 461).

Being engaged with a cause does not have to lead to activism. Not all individuals who consider the future of minority languages and cultures to be important want to or are able to become involved in its promotion, join social movements and

initiate activities, protests and direct action. Only some take the entire path from participating in minority culture, via engagement, all the way to activism. It has been noted that the more activities young people are involved with, the more they explore the world of engaged individuals and the greater the proportion of their friends has similar interests, the more closely they feel involved with the group and its ideals. This young man from Upper Lusatia describes how he became an activist:

**L24M(S):** Well, it started kind of automatically. It was not my conscious decision. It started when I was dancing in a group. And there I began to become involved in the organizational parts. And it went on like this to the next involvement, because they were looking for someone who could take over the local branch of the [Sorbian organization]. [...] And after, I went to Leipzig, and I joined the students club, *Sorabija*. Through *Sorabija* I started to write articles for the Sorbian press. One thing led to another. When you commit to one [activity] and look around, you begin to become involved in the next one.

For many engaged individuals, we are seeing the process escalating from one activity to another. As Maria Lewicka (1993: 25) puts it, this stems from their ongoing need to find new sources of inspiration. For individuals who are engaged and start motivating themselves, reaching a partial goal is not sufficient but instead serves as encouragement for further action. As one young Kashub states:

**NDR:** *So: the more you do, the more you get involved?*

**V20M(K):** Yes. The more it hurts you, the more it pisses you off, the more time you devote. [...] And at the end your friends tell you: "OK, fine, but give us a break, we're at the disco..." But at the same time it starts to build up in you. [...] And it starts to be your passion.

According to my interlocutors, when their involvement turns into a passion, it not only doesn't feel like a burden but gives them a sense of achievement and shapes their personalities. There frequently comes a point when young activists also take jobs involved with the minority culture and language. This young woman active in many fields of Breton language and culture and working for local authorities organizing Breton cultural festivals says:

**NDR:** *Where do all your ideas come from?*

**N23F(B):** I don't really know. Here it is a job, something to do with my degree, my interests and what I want to do. I've always been interested in theatre, and I've been involved with animation for seven years. And it so happens that something new happened with every step, and it ended up gaining incredible proportions. And I should really back down a bit, because I am struggling to keep up with everything... But I don't know, it's also all identity, it's something I've been doing for many years. I grew up in this environment. I also want to contribute to the survival of Breton in one way or another.

Current movements supporting minority languages are based on various types of engagement and activity. Since they are internally inconsistent and focused on many different dimensions (such as language, education, tradition, culture, tourism, economic development of the region, local politics), they are bound together by activists who tend to know one another and belong to different related circles. In this sense minority circles are inclusive and set up such that individuals create networks of connections between each other and between other organizations (Della Porta & Diani, 2006: 121–127).

Young activists frequently stress that their activities have a special meaning for their minority, since they are more aware of their peers' needs than adults who have been active for many years. Many have already experienced learning the minority language to be able to speak it, so they realize it is a process fraught with difficulties and requiring specific encouragement. Young people believe that they are closer to the issues, which makes them better at organizing more effective and attractive activities for their peers. Since participation may evolve into engagement, and – given the right conditions – into activism, the process somewhat resembles a self-propelling machine. It makes it easier for a generation of young people who are undecided of their ethnic belonging to find their place in the minority culture. This young Sorbian woman says:

**H25F(S):** Thanks to *Pawk* they [young people] have an opportunity to get to know young people from other villages and to take part in events. We try to do some modern projects, which attract young people, obviously, everything in Sorbian. We try to make them understand that what is in Sorbian, is not necessarily silly, serious or traditional. It is not only about literature, about culture, but the point is to do cool things together. We organized a modern music festival twice. One: the bands can present themselves, and it is contemporary Sorbian music, not folklore and classical stuff. Secondly: young people start to admit their Sorbianness openly. To realize their identity. But I think that the most important is to show that it really exists, that we can say “Hey, our culture is really rich,” and people see it.

Activism, including linguistic, is more than just participation in culture and promoting the minority. For my interlocutors it is also about general attitude. It is about collective action which shapes individual identity in relation to group identity. It means gradually internalizing group ideology, accepting it as one's own and learning a specific discourse. This young Breton man who is a member of the *Ai'Ta* collective says:

**Q20M(B):** It was really after I finished secondary school. [...] That was when I [became involved] with *Ai'Ta*. And it was there that I really started to do something. And I learned to talk about it, because whenever there's an *Ai'Ta* campaign, it always brings a lot of people together and we have to explain what we are doing and why, we have to try to convince them. So to start with I took over a discourse which wasn't necessarily my own, but then I started to think about it and I understood myself why it's important.

Since activism is tied with ideology, young people first have to understand it. This is why the engaged attitude of minority representatives develops through a process of a gradual understanding of individuals that the situation of the community and minority language differs from that of the dominant society. The following young man from Wales, active in *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* and working at a Welsh institution concerned with linguistic legislation, describes the process of realizing the need to fight for a better status for the language:

**K25M(W):** There is no kind of particular incident, it is gradual. [...] also learning the history of my nation and how people have been kept down in the past. [...] So learning things like that and spending a lot of time with my grandparents I guess. Especially my grandma was very strong in things like that. [...] And then they told me we had to defend it as well. At first it was like I believed in it with my heart but I also thought that it is something quite stupid. And then you realize that you have to defend it: like everyone asks you all the time “Can’t you speak English?” Well, yes, I can speak English but that is not the point. This is my country and I should be able to have things bilingually. And you have to justify it all the time. And you finally start to fight for your language.

As an individual’s awareness of prejudice grows, it turns into an opposition to the injustice and an understanding that since the group does not have sufficient clout or equivalence with surrounding cultures (Boksański, 2006: 92–97), it requires support. According to the following university student from Brittany, the opposition does not have to relate to the situation faced by a single specific minority to inspire him to action; rather, it becomes an opposition to inequality and discrimination in general:

**J21M(B):** I think that when you are young, you have to fight for something, for the weaker, whether they are minorities, language or something else. I think it’s important. And it’s sad that not everyone gets involved. After all there are so many things which need protecting today: Breton, the environment...

Sometimes it is direct, personal experience of discrimination in terms of language or origin which opens young people’s eyes and triggers resistance. This was the case for the following young Sorbian woman; despite participating in many cultural groups, she originally did not consider becoming an activist because she did not realize the situation was as bad as she had heard. Her attitude changed when she became a victim of persecution herself:

**A18F(S):** When I was still living in Budyšin and had driving lessons, one time I was coming home from theory lessons and I had a badge on my bag with the inscription “we were, we are, we will be,”<sup>62</sup> the Sorbian flag and a linden leaf. I carry it

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62 Motto symbolising the strength of the Sorbian nation, frequently used to stress the Sorbian nature of Lusatia.

because I am open about being Sorbian. This time three men followed me and were saying aggressively, “Hey, you Sorb, what do you want here in our country?” and things like that, really racist things. I thought about it for a long time and I was scared, but in the end, I thought that when something like that happens, you have to react to it. You can’t just leave it.

By joining in with activism, individuals express their refusal to accept their language being seen as inferior, disregard for minority right and outright discrimination. They refuse to accept the world as it is and demand change (Gitlin, 2003: 4). Young people I have spoken to, such as the following student of Welsh and member of several associations promoting the language, frequently believe that having been brought up in an atmosphere where they have to demand their rights makes them more aware that the world does not treat all people and languages aequal:

**U22M(W):** [...] I think this is a result of my upbringing in the Welsh language. Cause you realize that things are much related to social tensions and political events. I think as a Welsh language speaker you have much more opportunities to become political just because of the tensions and the pressure that is on the Welsh language. You are forced... more opportunities arise to become political just because you are aware of these tensions.

In fact, some young people cannot imagine that it is possible in today’s world to identify with a minority without being active in its promotion. I spoke with a young man from Kashubia who admits that he entered the world of the minority relatively recently. He states that until then he did not speak the language, he did not feel any connection with the culture and did not feel the need to develop them. However, a chance encounter (through work) put him in touch with various aspects of today’s Kashubia and he quickly felt himself drawn to it. From that point on, he has been involved and started sympathizing with the Kashubian nationalist movement:

**V20M(K):** [...] I think you can’t be a young Kashub without being an activist.

**NDR:** *Why?*

**V20M(K):** Because once you start getting involved, it starts to matter. And when it starts to matter, you realize there are so few of you that being Kashubian needs to be highlighted, at least for the next few years. [...] You have to try all the time to maintain this awareness in yourself and show it to other people, because you feel that by getting involved, in these topics, you simply feel the threats.

The sense of threat, injustice, refusal to accept discrimination and prejudice of weaker groups also fosters a sense of responsibility. This is widely seen as the basis for all kinds of activism (Sherrod et al., 2006: 599). The sense of responsibility means that despite difficult conditions, young people do not give up and become more deeply involved instead. This young woman from Kashubia says:

**O24F(K):** [...] If I did feel responsible, I wouldn't organize as many activities, volunteering many hours, sometimes for weeks just to complete a given project. I wouldn't stand in the freezing rain, helping housewives from the countryside to sell bread with lard. If I did not feel responsible, I would simply do nothing. But I do something. It proves that I do feel responsible.

This Breton student who graduated from Diwan and tries to be involved with different activities promoting Breton language and culture, even though it is not easy where he currently lives, says:

**Q20M(B):** Today I think that if I did not feel responsible, I would be irresponsible. Then what I do wouldn't serve anything. It is my duty, maybe even despite myself, I have to be responsible. It's not so much that I feel responsible that I am responsible. Because I speak Breton. And it would be irrational on my part if I said I am not responsible.

I asked the following young Welshman whether he feels responsible for the future of Welsh language and culture by organizing many cultural activities and serving many functions in Welsh circles. His answer was very enthusiastic:

**O20M(W):** Yes, yes, yes, yes! I'd stress it every time I go somewhere. I can't stress it more than if you don't take that Welsh course, these courses won't be there next year. And if you don't take these courses for a few years maybe there won't be any Welsh at university at all. If we don't use Welsh, we will lose the privileges we have. And we cannot lose them. [...] We have to think how to win it: culturally, academically, socially. Also politically. The big challenge is to get young people in favour of it, so the Welsh language and identity is important for them. [...] Influencing others and responsibility are the most important. I hope that I have both. Someone said to me one day: "There is no point in organizing this event, there is only a couple of people coming." And I said, "well, that's a couple of people more than before to be interested." And if I manage to change one person's mind or get that one person on board, to learn the language, to appreciate it or whatever, I've won. I can be happy.

## Types of activism

Just like engagement, cultural and linguistic activism manifests differently at different times and in different contexts (Combs & Penfield, 2012: 461). The choice of actions, means and slogans of protest, and the ability and extent to which individuals can act, depend on the situation of the given language, its existing protection mechanisms, the most important threats, and the attitude towards it from the minority and dominant communities. Bernard Spolsky described linguistic activists as important actors of language management, since their ideas have a single goal: preserving or revitalizing the threatened language. "Working at a grassroots level, they attempt to influence existing, former, or potential speakers

of the language to continue its use and to persuade government to support their plans. Lacking authority, they depend on acceptance of their ideology by those they try to influence..." (Spolsky, 2009: 204). He also notes that the situation of linguistic activists is very different to that experienced by the previous generation, which fought for basic rights for language minorities when their very existence was being completely ignored. The older generation stood up to the authorities and systems excluding minority languages and cultures from public discourse. Today, activists are backed by local, regional, national and even international organizations supporting their activities at least on a symbolic level. These conditions affect engagement and motivation, at least to some extent. Today, linguistic activism is mainly aimed at communities, although it also includes supralocal and even global themes, since young people are able to keep in touch with activists from other minorities by creating networks and belonging to international support organizations.

Lonnie Sherrod (2006: 2) writes: "Activism includes protest events and actions, advocacy for causes, and information dissemination to raise consciousness." In her view, in this context even writing letters to the authorities can be regarded as activism. Let us then examine different kinds of activities young people engage in, starting from those which may not be widely regarded as activism while also meeting all the criteria of engagement.

Activities supporting minority languages do not have to be spectacular. In a situation when the greatest threats to minority languages are progressing assimilation, linguistic ideology which leads to the minority language being seen as an inferior form of communication, and indifference of existing and potential users of the language, activism starts from individual choices (Combs & Penfield, 2012: 463). The most important element is learning the minority language and striving to use it even when it is not welcome. The basic rule of all language speakers, which is also the most commonly broken, is the right to use the language all the time (Hudley, 2013: 813). In this context, choosing the minority language is not neutral: it automatically draws categorization, because it is perceived by young people as an engaged act. I spoke to a young Breton woman whose father speaks the language, who attended an immersive school and who now promotes Breton in the city where she studies. When asked whether speaking Breton can be seen as a form of activism, she says:

**K21F(B):** Not for me, because for me it wasn't a choice. But maybe it is. Yes. Since I graduated from a bilingual school and I speak Breton with my friends, to me it's still natural and I don't really feel like I am an activist. But it's true that when we hear people's reactions, such as "Oh, you are speaking Breton, even though you could be speaking French. You're brave," and so on, then as soon as we start explaining, we are categorized as a group [of activists] and sometimes even [accused of] nationalism or chauvinism. And all we're doing is speaking Breton!

Another young Breton goes as far as saying that in a world where everything happens in Breton, speaking the minority language becomes a political decision.

This is especially the case when it is not simply a decision to choose the language to speak with friends, but using the minority language in a situation when, rationally speaking, this may have no actual benefits. This student of political sciences from Wales, strongly engaged in direct activities promoting the language, chose to do his degree in Welsh:

**NDR:** *So you think that choosing the Welsh language [as a language of study] is as well a kind of activism?*

**B20M(W):** Yes, I think so. The thing is that there are not many of us who do it. Studying at [name of faculty] in my year, in Welsh, there are only eight of us. And this is compared to about 200 who do it in English. So it is definitely a kind of activism because everyone in the Welsh language community of students is very nationalistic. And every time we get something from our department and it is only in English, like information about an exam or something, we e-mail back asking why it is not in Welsh. So there is definitely activism behind it.

During my interviews, I even encountered claims that learning a minority language makes no sense unless it is combined with ongoing engagement and active promotion. This is especially clearly stated in situations where language communities have become dispersed and it is difficult to find circles where the language is regularly used. This is sometimes the case in Brittany. This secondary-school student from an immersive school describes this relationship:

**DD16K(B):** [...] if I speak Breton, I cannot keep it just to myself. It would make no sense to know the language and do nothing about it. If I speak Breton, I would like that something comes from it. I would like to be inside of it, to create some projects, some activities on behalf of this language. Only then it makes sense.

The effort put into learning and using a minority language is an obligation to act. One such act is objecting when rights given to the language are not respected. A young Welsh student describes her attitude to activism:

**D20K(W):** [Being a Welsh language activist] means to fight for what I feel is right about the language. If there weren't bilingual signs here and now, I would probably complain and ask the office of translation to provide one and then they'd set it up. I also make it known I am a Welsh speaker and I am proud. I try to start every conversation if I can in Welsh like if I am going to shop and I want to get something I ask in Welsh. And I only switch to English if someone says "Oh, I am sorry I don't speak Welsh." I also sign petitions, protest if I have to...

Another type of activity aiming to show the power of the movement is demonstrations. They are held differently in different regions with different goals. In Kashubia, direct demonstrations are almost non-existent, apart from parades during festivals and events such as the Kashubian Congress. However, participants do not usually carry banners with political messages. These first appeared with the creation of the *Kaszëbskô Jednota* association. In Lusatia, demonstrations have been held more frequently in recent years, in particular to highlight threats to

specific groups: school closures, demolition of villages to open lignite mines or proposed cuts to Sorbian culture and language funding. In Wales, demonstrations are held regularly, forming a part of a longstanding tradition of a struggle for language rights started with the *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* demonstration on a bridge in Aberystwyth in 1962. Sometimes demonstrations can turn into skirmishes. In Brittany, demonstrations are mainly held to show that there are still people who consider the future of Breton to be important. The occasions bring together all groups, communities and associations supporting the language and culture; they form a core part of the Breton movement and symbolize it. Young people describe them passionately:

**A25F(B):** [We participate in demonstrations] in order to show that we exist, and we don't want to be pigeonholed! Because without activism there would be no Diwan schools, and without them there would be no Breton language in its current form. I think it allows us to do what we want, to live our lives. If it were not for activism, we would live the life politicians designed for us. Demonstrations are supposed to show that we exist; they are a time when we can scream as loud as we can when we are treated unjustly or when we don't agree with something. You have to fight whenever you lack things you need to live or things that we want. If we didn't do it, we wouldn't have what we have now. [...] There is still much to do. As long as there is something to be done, there will be demonstrations.

Demonstrations symbolize opposition to political decisions and a disregard for the language by the political system. Almost all young people from Wales and Brittany whom I interviewed attend demonstrations, and many also organize them. This Welsh student describes activities he has been engaged with since secondary school, stating that the social aspects of these activities were as important to him as their political angle:

**U22M(W):** Yes, we did the stuff like we went down to the town during lunchtime to protest maybe or on Saturdays, we organized rallies. We arranged buses taking people for the Welsh gigs... once a month we had a gig, so we arranged buses to go to that. Or arranged the gigs ourselves as well. We went down to Cardiff for rallies as well. We liked it definitely because it was an opportunity to socialize and feel you're doing something wise. As a Welsh language speaker, you feel the pressure all the time because it is a minority language, so all this pressure creates a sort of political tensions, so it is a way of expressing what you believe in and what is important to you.

The most visible type of activism is direct action. It is in these cases that the traditions and achievements of activism of older generations are the most clearly reflected in the practices of young people. This is also because "The 'technology' of protest evolves slowly, limited by the traditions handed down from one generation of activists to the next, and crystallized in institutions" (Della Porta & Diani, 2006: 181), stressing the symbolic ties with earlier movements. However, there is space in all activities for the creativity of new generations and individuals (Della

Porta & Diani, 2006: 168–196). This is why in Lusatia direct actions of social disobedience are only used in extreme cases. An informal group of social disobedience *A Serbsce?* [What About Sorbian?] was formed recently, based on linguistic movements found in Western Europe. Its activists post stickers bearing the slogan on buildings which should be but are not bilingual (cf. Mieczkowska, 2012). However, the group's activities are criticized by older Sorbian activists, as well as by some young people.<sup>63</sup> Young activists of the *Kaszëbskô Jednota* association have only recently launched similar campaigns, which so far remain almost invisible. In Brittany, individuals from the immersive Diwan schools created the “pacifist organization of social disobedience” *Ai'Ta* a few years ago; the group organizes demonstrations and spontaneous “wild *fest-noz*”<sup>64</sup> in public spaces drawing public attention to the issues facing Breton, covers up French-language signs in cities, and demand the introduction of Breton in public offices through original campaigns developed by young people. Many young people admit that they have joined or intend to join *Ai'Ta* since the collective does not get directly involved with politics while expressing protest against the absence of Breton in public life through interesting campaigns. This student who attended an immersive secondary school says:

**Q20M(B):** I started joining *Ai'Ta*'s campaigns and I realized that I like the collective's philosophy and that it pertains to me personally. In terms of activities, to start with they were mainly amusing, nice campaigns. Maybe they are less nice now, but we are trying to do something which is a form of protest. Something which is visible and taken up by the media to show our message. And I like that about this collective.

The activities of *Ai'Ta* recall those taken by *Stourm ar Brezhoneg* [Struggle for Breton], which has been taking radical steps since its earliest days to demand major changes from the French government through campaigns of destroying or defacing French monolingual signs and demanding an official statute for Breton in public life (cf. Nicolas, 2001). In its attitude, the latter group has mainly been seeking inspiration from the Welsh association *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* (cf. Phillips, 2000). People joining in with *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*'s activities feel that they are truly able to influence decisions being made about their language:

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63 A Sorbian secondary school student [D17M(S)] stated: “There are these Sorbian stickers ‘*A Serbsce?*’, so I partly think that’s cool because it can be a hot topic, but I also don’t know if it makes sense to get involved with how money is managed and so on.” This attitude also reveals the conservative tendencies of Sorbs.

64 Such “wild *fest-noz*” recall the traditional Breton events during which participants dance in chains, accompanied by music and alcohol. In the 1970s, they became a symbol of the struggle for the ethnic and linguistic revival of Brittany (cf. Dołowy-Rybińska, 2013a); they are organised without official permits at sites and venues not designated for public gatherings or events.

**A20M(W):** I know, there are different types of people. Some people like lobbying and sending letters and other people like to campaign. I like to campaign. [...] It started when I was in the sixth form [...] there was always too few of us who chose to do the minimum in Welsh. [...] And it made me think that it wasn't right, that I have to defend it [...] I joined *Cymdeithas Yr Iaith*, the Welsh Language Society, and I decided I had to do something [...] In my village everything is monolingual, English only, and that's not right. I contacted a person responsible but nothing changed. We only heard some excuses. We sent many letters, made a lot of phone calls – no reaction. So we decided to take matters into our own hands and we bought some spray cans. When I sprayed the signs, they installed bilingual ones. It was the first thing I did myself after becoming a CYI member.

It is very rare that activism leads to political engagement in groups of such young activists. Most young people speak of politics with contempt or disdain, believing that politicians are not interested in the future of minority languages since they only care about current interests of voters. Political engagement comes later, similarly to joining organizational structures of the minority. However, this also depends on context. Some young Kashubs involved in promoting their language see their activism in categories of political belonging. In Upper Lusatia, a few young people are interested in political debates, including the recent, notorious initiative to establish a *Serbski sejm* (Sorbian Parliament).<sup>65</sup> In recent years, Brittany has achieved partial cultural autonomy, while Breton parties and political organizations with different policies rooted in Breton issues have far-reaching traditions (cf. Dołowy-Rybińska, 2011: 152–157). Some have youth wings; however, when I contacted them, I discovered that there are very few members aged 25 or under, and those listed are not active or keen to talk. Certain young Welsh activists are more closely involved with politics in the belief that in the current situation of advanced autonomy certain decisions must be taken on a political level. As one student relates:

**B20M(W):** I joined *Plaid Cymru* and *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* [...] when I was 17. Because I was going to join a university a year after and I thought that maybe I should start to be more involved in politics. So I decided to join the political party, not only supporting it but also to play an active role [...] and expand my duties and contribute towards it. And since then I also took part in different riots and gatherings.

## Attitudes towards activism

Given that attitudes to activism vary in different countries and regions depending on local history, achievements and associated mythology, not all young people

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65 An initiative to create another body (separate to *Domowina*) to concern itself with Sorbian rights. The parliament would make decisions concerning the Sorbs and Sorbian languages. See [www.serbski-sejmik.de](http://www.serbski-sejmik.de).

who are engaged in activities promoting the minority language and culture want to be referred to as activists and identified with groups which are widely seen as involved with activism. This reflects interesting tendencies involved with the shifting paradigm of engagement and activism in today's world. Some of my interlocutors go so far as to state that – in comparison with the local stereotype image of activists – they do not consider themselves to be activists. This young Kashubian woman who participates in and organizes many events supporting the language and works in Kashubian media is not even sure whether she would say that she “is active in promoting Kashubian culture.”

**H24F(K):** I don't know if I am active in promoting Kashubian culture. I wouldn't say so. I am not active in any association, Pomorania, I am not a member of any group, I don't organize events. I am just an active participant of all these things.

She goes on to explain that she feels this way because people who consider themselves to be activists belong to a world she does not identify with:

**H24F(K):** Because I am not so driven by ideology as people from Gdańsk. I haven't got such a fixation on this point. [...] I would prefer if it were more natural. Because I don't think that it is the most important thing in the world, even though it's often like that at work, I am immersed in this always, all the time.

This student of Sorbian studies who is involved in many cultural fields describes her activities in the minority in a similar way. She does not want to admit that she is an activist, comparing her engagement with that of “real activists:”

**A18F(S):** I am not engaged directly, but for example I went to Europeada,<sup>66</sup> I help out at a folk festival, I organize activities for Sorbian-speaking children – on Sundays we have activities such as painting and tinkering. I am more engaged with church life, also with kids.

The following young man from Brittany who graduated from an immersive secondary school and now runs a website dedicated to creative work by young Breton speakers and participates in Breton-language activities for young people in the city where he is studying admits to being an activist, but only reluctantly so:

**J21M(B):** Yes, I am one in spite of myself, because I don't have the impression that I am an activist. But it turns out that in relation to my friends who don't speak Breton, I am almost – in comparison to them – an extreme activist. Because they don't do anything, they don't defend this in any way. And I... well... I went to Diwan school and we went on demonstrations to save our school, to fight for everything we had... So I guess yes, I am an activist. And it's natural, I suppose...

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66 Football championships for European minorities.

What kind of action is regarded as activism depend on the perspective. People who have no ties to the Breton movement, do not speak the language and are not active participants in Breton culture see learning the language as a form of activism, and even more so using it in the public sphere. Individuals who know and use Breton claim that activism should involve direct action. In turn, people engaged in specific direct action believe “real activists” to be individuals whose actions have a political and anti-state dimension. This means that individual attitudes depend on ideology, location and historical circumstances which form the context, giving the idea of activism positive or negative connotations (Kassimir, 2006: 23). In Lusatia, the very terms “activism” or “activist” stir protest. Sorbs regularly claim that the phenomenon is unknown in Lusatia. This is because activism is semantically linked with active and politically-motivated protesting and struggling for rights, and these kinds of activities are very conservative and extremely rare in Lusatia. Young Welsh people I interviewed who are not members of *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* do not see Welsh activism associated with the organization as attractive to them: the original goals have been met and Welsh is now one of the official languages in the country. They are against any illegal activities, such as arson at holiday cottages owned by English visitors, since they believe it undermines the movement. Some, such as this student of Welsh who has been engaged in promoting the language in various spheres of life for many years, state categorically:

**NDR:** *Do you consider yourself an activist?*

**M20F(W):** No, I am not at all. Don't get me wrong, I think Welsh is important and worth keeping alive but... I associate a certain type of person as being a Welsh language activist. I am not one of these people [...]. I know that some people got a strong passion for the language. I got it as well, but I show it in a different way. I think when it comes to politics and stuff like that, having a party for Wales, independence, I think... the stuff like that doesn't interest me. I think it is not really a question of politics to keep the Welsh language alive. And I don't think that refusing to talk in English would keep the Welsh language alive.

Young people are also concerned about social exclusion resulting from illegal activities, since the majority have serious considerations about their future professional lives. They believe that at this stage of the struggle the goal should be convincing people to speak Welsh rather than fighting for new rights. The following student of Welsh, active in an association of Welsh-speaking students and member of a Welsh-language amateur theatre, says:

**G19F(W):** Lots of bad things have happened concerning the Welsh activism lately, burning down cottages and things like that. That is not fair, and I think they were wrong to do it. Yes, it was a political statement, but they could have done it another way. And you have a lot of people judging it, people who blame activists for that, just like me. Because I think there are other, peaceful ways of doing it. And I think for the people who want to do it, that's fine, but I don't feel like I need to because

I know that I will be probably living the rest of my life through the medium of Welsh. And I am happy about this, but I wouldn't say that I am an activist.

Present-day activists are far more concerned about extremism and being accused of radical activism than their parents' generation. They see it as their duty to encourage people to use the language, rather than to coerce change. Many believe that it is only possible to convince people who are yet to decide to participate in revitalization projects by painting a positive image of the minority culture, language and activists. One young Breton woman engaged with culture says:

**S22F(B):** It's quite complicated and not one-dimensional, because activism can turn into extremism, which isn't any good for anyone. But I also disagree with forcing people into anything. We mustn't force people, we don't have this power, and it isn't our goal. Our goal is to make people love Breton culture rather than imposing it on them.

One secondary-school student who is a member of a music ensemble and has an interest in Breton politics does not want to be seen as an activism for similar reasons. When I asked him how he would describe his position, he responds:

**T16M(B):** Perhaps "defender" [*défenseur*] would be more appropriate, because I think that "activist" [*militant*] makes one think of shutting others out. It makes me think of a struggle for independence. That's what I associate activism with.

Regardless of how young people engaged with minority cultures and languages describe themselves, they belong to a narrow group of individuals who are not indifferent and who have chosen to take on a responsibility for the future of their communities. Spending more time with them and among them reveals that those circles attract individuals with specific personality traits.

## Activist profiles

Not all individuals engaged in activities promoting minority language and culture become activists. This depends on a range of factors, a key of which is personality such as mental traits, temperament, experience and cultural models in the individual's circles (cf. Szymczak, 2013). Based on my interviews with young people, it is easier to describe a set of traits common to activists rather than define their background: some come from families speaking the minority language at home and were brought up in an environment of live cultural transmission, while others grew up in families where the minority language was not spoken at all. Others have no family ties with the minority. Wide-ranging studies have shown, however, that young activists tend to come from educated, middle-class families and believe that their attitude and engagement can influence the world. Writing about how young people, especially secondary-school students, shift towards using Catalan, Joan Pujolar notes that this relatively rare phenomenon mainly occurs in "good" students who achieve good results. He found that for this reason

Catalan is being associated with people who are educated and have a wide range of skills, while the monolingual sector is left to individuals who are not as well educated (Pujolar & Puigdevall, 2015: 175). Some of my interlocutors from all the minorities I investigated made similar observations. Trying to define individuals who are active in Kashubian circles at her school, this secondary-school student from Kashubia says:

**U18F(K):** Really, they are good students who have always been interested in more than just what we are learning during lessons. [...] They prepare for dictation tests [in Kashubian], for competitions, and they've always been interested in it. [...] Maybe because they've been aware that it's important to them.

To a large extent, activism requires acting as part of a group with other people.<sup>67</sup> According to Thomas R. Rochon, group solidarity is a type of politicized group identity. In his view, as well as awareness of group belonging, solidarity is based on three kinds of attitude: dissatisfaction with the current status of the group, a belief that it is driven by external political, social and economic factors, and a conviction that acting together can improve this situation. "Identification with a group encourages a person to associate group interests with individual interests. Solidarity with that group brings with it an expectation that other group members will be mobilized for the cause" (Rochon, 1998: 101). The desire to get involved and act is one of the most important traits described by young activists. This politically-engaged young man from Kashubia says:

**K22M(K):** [...] I wouldn't be able to sit down in an armchair after work and just watch TV. Although sometimes a man just wants to come home, sit down and do absolutely nothing, just turn on a stupid TV show, but I know that after two days like that I would be bored out of my mind. I'd have to go somewhere, do something, organize something.

Being active goes hand in hand with an attitude of not accepting indifference. Just experiencing mobilization and action has an impact on individuals, since it helps them gain an awareness and understanding of the world around them. Engaging with activism allows people to distance themselves from a sense of helplessness in the face of unfavourable circumstances (Rochon, 1998: 134). This attitude translates into engagement and specific linguistic practices. The following young man from Wales who became interested in Welsh after graduating from secondary school and soon became involved with activities promoting it notes that the situation faced by the language depends on individual choices made by young people rather than (just) on suggested ideas:

**S19M(W):** It is a question of opportunities, but opportunities are not enough. It is rather making something that people want to take part in. You know, I could open

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67 Although it should be said that activists also can and do act alone.

a book club in Welsh but no one would come. [...] Sometimes it is about creating opportunities for ourselves: going into the shop and asking people to speak Welsh. Not just waiting because no one will give us this opportunity.

As discussed by Meira Levinson, the decision to participate in civic life is at least in part determined by individual attitudes. It depends on whether the individual believes that anyone can influence authorities (political efficacy), that they have a duty to participate in civic life (civic duty) and that every individual is a part of a larger society (civic identity) (Levinson, 2010: 341). This attitude is shaped by a range of factors, including social capital gained at home, school or elsewhere, and individual predispositions and character. One Welsh activist who describes himself as a “political animal” says:

**O20M(W):** [...] I was always the one who stayed and joined in the conversation. And I was listening to the group. I would have been about 12 but adults were always around me. And I would rather stay there and listen to the conversation than go and play or watch the telly. This is what my brother would do. Since then I have always found myself a bit more inclined to listen to people. But I think from around the age of Urdd both me and my brother were involved in Wales and Welshness. From the beginning it was an activist movement, you know, going against the main trends, going against what it is or used to be or should be. When I first found out that speaking Welsh in the classroom is [perceived as] something wrong, I rebelled.

His statement makes a reference to another very important trait common to activists: disagreeing with the current order. Rebecca Klatch, an American sociologist studying social movements, notes that “commitment to a social movement involves not only conviction about what is wrong with the world, but also the decision to act out these beliefs, to strive for social change. Commitment also means a conception of oneself as someone who takes action in defence of deeply held values, someone who cares” (Klatch, 1999: 97). This is confirmed by my interlocutors. This Breton activist who is also involved with environmental movements says:

**NDR:** *What character traits do you have to have to become an activist?*

**H20M(B):** It’s hard to say, because there are many kinds of activism. I think the main trait is that when you see how things work, you are not able to ignore them, walk right by it. I can’t imagine that not doing anything, that I come home from work and just don’t care about the world. Because there is always a reason to defend something. Especially for us, in the Breton milieu. There is always something to do, something to fight for. For funding, for our rights. I think that’s what we learned at the Diwan. That and the fact that you have to fight injustice. For me, it comes completely naturally.

As stated above, activism is strongly linked with collective identity which is shaped by acting as part of a group. Individuals who join in organized movements

slowly try fitting in with the group. Activism can also drive a sense of self-worth and improve perception of individual and collective effectiveness (Sherrod et al., 2006: 319). This combination means that engaged individuals will strive to join or create a group they can work with. One of the young leaders of the *Kaszëbskô Jednota* association says:

**J21M(K):** I decided that it can't be that I just shut myself off and that's it, and I feel self-satisfaction. You have to go further and look for people. [...] I've been able to gather a group and it has since grown and we meet and act in different directions.

Activists put in a lot of energy and effort in their actions. Many young people I interviewed are involved with various kinds of campaigns and devote their time and energy. One Sorbian activist involved with the *Pawk* association notes:

**E17F(S):** Sometimes you have to be careful, you're doing this and that, and here and there, and then someone else asks you [for help], and suddenly there's so much. I'm the kind of person who always agrees: "Sure, I'll help, I'll do something with you."

Based on personal experience, Todd Gitlin writes: "The wrong motives not only corrupt and betray you, they are more likely to bring bad results" (Gitlin, 2003: 10). Ilona Hłowiecka-Tańska states that the activist mindset is rooted in "selflessness, understood as subordination of individual interests to those of the community, an ethics of service and altruism, and a sense of solidarity with those weaker than yourself" (Hłowiecka-Tańska, 2011: 93). This young Kashubian activist who has been working in minority media stresses the activism aspects of engagement:

**O24F(K):** For one, to be engaged in such activities, you have to be a community worker. [...] the proportion of active people is low, and it doesn't just apply to Kashubian circles. It's because there are people who then continue being active, and those for whom these activities are partly communal... because Kashubia may be a way of life, but it will never be the most lucrative, the most fashionable. You can find a place for yourself in it, but it's not the mainstream. Obviously.

This is why individuals who decide to join with such movements must have share one more trait: they must not be driven by any material benefits from such activities. The lack of financial reward for their efforts may be compensated for at a later stage, when young activists find employment involving promoting and supporting the minority. The jobs may be at political organizations or minority associations, the media, educational establishments or institutions. Research by Ilona Hłowiecka-Tańska indicates that being able to raise finance for minority activities eliminates this part of the "ethos which demanded that moral value should be measured by the degree of a person's indifference to material issues" (2011: 95). However, this aspect of activism very rarely arose in my interviews. This may be due to the ages of my interlocutors; they are largely young enough not to have to worry about financially supporting themselves and they see activism in a different light than older people. However, the closer they are to graduating from university and

having to find a job, the more they are concerned whether their engagement will work in their favour. As one young woman from Brittany puts it:

**K21F(B):** Well, there is something... when you are writing your CV, all those engagements are not really recognized. Only your professional experience is taken into account. And in my case, it would only be babysitting... And animation... well, I never did it professionally. I prefer to organize unofficial concerts supporting people with no papers or to take part in a festival against the language change. I think that through this engagement we feel really free, that we are doing what we want to do. [...] It is just a pleasure.

A sense of standing up for an important cause is a reward for the effort; however, the pleasure derived from these activities does not last forever. Fatigue can set in between activities which increase energy and working with others which gives young people a sense of belonging to a community and being involved in something important. Having an overarching goal helps young activists cope. However, the sacrifices they have to make in advance are real. This young Breton woman who combines volunteering in culture, animation and education with a recently started job at a school says:

**NDR:** *Is it tiring sometimes?*

**A25F(B):** Yes. Especially in winter [laughs]. Especially in winter, because you have to go in the evening, after work... It feels far more difficult in winter than in summer. Because in summer there are also all the festivals, everyone speaks Breton and that gives me energy. There is a lot of fun. And in the summer, you have to build up strength to last you through winter. I am mainly talking about evening Breton courses, because that's volunteering. And work is work, you have to go one way or another and I don't ask myself whether I want to or not. And when it comes to volunteering, these questions always arise.

All these people and their statements are united by two key traits of young activists: passion and optimism. Such engagement would not be possible without faith that activism can bring about social change, that the effort will be repaid in some way, that actions taken by various kinds of collectives can genuinely influence other people's ability and desire to use minority languages. Therefore, it is worth listening to how young people themselves perceive the benefits of their activism and engagement.

### **Subjective perception of benefits of activism**

Participation in social movements is not rewarded in the same way as participation in other types of organizations. Activism does not provide a financial incentive, not all activities are socially acceptable, and their effectiveness remains uncertain. Additionally, the cost of participation in such movements can be high, because their activities may be stigmatized by members of the community or by the authorities (Rochon, 1998: 95). However, members of subsequent generations

continue joining social movements and activities striving to implement change. This means that they must be driven by something other than financial gratification. The sociologist Olivier Bobineau states that engaged individuals become involved out of a desire to feel useful; being engaged brings them satisfaction and a sense that they are doing something important (such as fighting for the rights of underprivileged groups). Other benefits he lists include bringing sense to one's life and joining a group with strong bonds which are different to those between family members or work colleagues (Bobineau, 2010: 100–122). My interlocutors expressed similar views on the benefits of engagement. This young woman from Lusatia says that for her activism is mainly about enjoyment and a sense of responsibility for the future of the community:

**H25F(S):** [...] when a person becomes involved, you notice that activism is good for you, you take pleasure in it, you become increasingly immersed. You want to be a Sorb and pass it on.

Many people take up jobs at minority institutions or in the media as volunteers and activists. However, this does not mean that they have given up on being active. Employees of minority organizations (both public and cooperative) frequently remain activists, simply turning their engagement into a source of income (cf. Zabaleta et al., 2009). This young Breton woman who works for the local government and is involved in activities on many levels says:

**N23F(B):** [...] I think it's something which has come up slowly, and I think that I was simply able to make the most of many opportunities. Like Breton theatre, BAFA,<sup>68</sup> which I did in Breton and I really wanted to do more with it. And every time I could make something else of it. It's a lot of things like that. And [the organization where I work] – they found me. Because they already knew me, because [local authorities] are responsible for young people's affairs, such as Breton-language camps. So they already knew me from the work I did in the summer and came to me and said: "We are organizing a festival, we need someone who can do it, who can speak Breton." So the language was always my strong point and I was always able to use it to progress, and it has helped me with my work.

Activism means young people gain experience, learn new skills and meet new people who are also engaged with protecting minority languages. As well as teaching them specific skills, they stress that the work brings them a lot of satisfaction and a sense of belonging. This young man from Kashubia who is active in many organizational and political fields says:

**NDR:** *What do you personally get out of your engagement on behalf of Kashubia?*

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68 *Le brevet d'aptitude aux fonctions d'animateur en accueils collectifs de mineurs* – an internship and diploma entitling the holders to work with children and teenagers.

**N22M(K):** Satisfaction, above all else. Pride and a feeling that I am not passive. As you know, there are not many young people like this, who act in a Kashubian environment. I feel that I'm not standing passively on the side, but I get involved and try to act as much as I can, to give all that I have. That's one thing. The other thing I get out of it is the fact that I'm learning all the time. [...] I get to know the specificity of differences of opinion, ideology, different perspectives on various issues related to being Kashub.

Engagement also gives young people a sense of meaning, and makes them feel like they stand out from the crowd and are contributing to something valuable. When asked what gives her life meaning, this teenage activist who recently joined the Welsh association *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* gives a similar answer to the Kashub mentioned above:

**Y16F(W):** The satisfaction that I am doing something. That I am not being a normal teenager, who gets home and watches TV. I actually believe in something, I am doing something. And it is to show I believe, to show it to others who don't want to go out and do things. They are ready to judge us, but they wouldn't do it themselves.

An important dimension mentioned by all my interlocutors and which I have discussed above is the existence of a group individuals feel close to and can depend on. Identifying with a group also means that individuals internalize its interests. "Solidarity with that group brings with it an expectation that other group members will be mobilized for the cause. People high in group solidarity spend a relatively large proportion of their time interacting with others in the group and talking about the issues that concern the group" (Rochon, 1998: 134). This young Breton woman studying in Rennes and active in several associations says:

**NDR:** *The fact that you're committed to a cause, what does it give you?*

**O24K(B):** What does it give me? You remember when I told you that there's a community of Breton speakers, right? It works like this: if you're in the community, you're part of a kind of a chain, where everyone knows each other. It's nice to be in, because we always know what's going on. It's important in social terms, in terms of our relations. It's funny, because it always turns out that you know someone who knows someone who knows someone else... it's really cool. So, in social terms, sure.

However, the most important and most frequently mentioned benefit of engagement is that it brings meaning. This young Kashubian activist explains:

**J21M(K):** I don't know, in my case it has become something I love, and... for me it has become my whole life. And I don't really see my life making sense beyond it, and this is where I find myself most fully.

He is echoed by a young passionate man from Wales who has devoted himself to the protection of and respect for linguistic rights:

**A20M(W):** It gives you a reason to do something. I spend my days campaigning, asking anybody, my friends if something is happening. And if I see bilingualism is not working, I am trying to find a solution to these problems. What would I do with my time if I didn't? Maybe I could sit down and have a cup of tea? I don't know. But, you know, it gives you a reason to be who you are. If you can't fight for things that are important for you, what is endangered, then what you have? If you have a passion for your language, you want to make sure that other people can join you in what you are enjoying. It gives you a cause to be who you are, isn't it?

A young woman with whom I talked, and who is involved with (frequently illegal) campaigns in Wales and encourages other young people to join them, expresses a similar sentiment when asked about benefits of activism. For her, activism is not simply acting towards a specific goal, but also a way of life, perceiving reality and responding to injustice and wrongdoing:

**E25F(W):** [Being an activist] gives me everything, a sense of life. I think if I wasn't campaigning for the Welsh language, I would be interested in human rights, animal rights, whatever. [...] Finding something I could change was always the thing for me and... I came across *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*, I got involved, and I felt I could change something. And I really can. So yes, being able to feel that you are changing something, changing minds, attitudes, changing ideas, changing policies and changing everything. And I think, that gives me more than anything. It gives me a sense of achieving something and it is important and this can be carried on. It is tiring because you are constantly pushing things and sometimes you have this feeling that you are not getting anywhere but then something happens and it encourages you and gives you power to act.

We can also consider the extent to which young people's engagement and activism are to do with belonging to a minority culture and their personalities. Of course, it is impossible to determine whether they would be as engaged and socially and politically active had they not belonged to minorities, nor is it possible to separate their experiences from the very fact that they belong to minorities. However, I was interested in finding out whether they themselves think that under other circumstances they would have been as engaged in community life. The young Welsh woman quoted above says:

**E25F(W):** Campaigning is a part of this. If I weren't Welsh I wouldn't be campaigning, I don't know. I'd probably be campaigning for something else. There are so many things as important to campaign for. So campaigning is a thing that defines me as being Welsh. The constant campaigning for, yes, even to speak Welsh. It is quite a negative thing actually, isn't it? But [being Welsh] is quite unique as well. It is a kind of being different, and I like being different.

According to her, activism is tied to her attitude towards her life and the world as a whole. This young Breton man involved with activities promoting the language

expresses a similar view; however, he is also aware that he will have leave to Brittany for at least a few years, if not for his entire professional life:

**Q20M(B):** I know that wherever I live I will be engaged with local issues. Because for me being Breton, just like being anyone else, is about animating your region, your place. It's important to keep things moving and so that people can express their opinions on all matters. And for me it's obvious that I will be engaged.

### The world of activists as they view it

When I asked my interlocutors how they perceive existing movements promoting their language and culture, I received a very wide range of answers. Some are wholly convinced that almost everyone in their community is engaged because this is precisely what lies at the core of their community. In turn, some claim sadly that there are only a handful of individuals who are engaged and they hardly include any young people. Why such a wide range of answers? On the one hand it could be because of my interlocutors' intentions, hoping that I perceive their culture in a specific light. On the other hand, young people who spend time in activist circles are surrounded by similarly-minded people who are also their acquaintances, friends and companions in their activities. They also spend their free time together, therefore they may perceive their community in a rather idealized way. This very active young Sorbian woman has the impression that all her peers are involved in culture one way or another:

**E17F(S):** There are those who don't do all that much, but everyone has something they are involved with. I don't know anyone who doesn't do anything. Most of my friends have a lot of activities, and they don't know what they need to do when. I don't know. I have a sense that most Sorbs do a lot.

This image of how representatives of minorities are engaged is as typical of activists as it is deceptive. A different view can be cast by individuals who have joined minority activities recently and are not yet as hermetically surrounded by people with similar interests. This secondary-school student from Wales says:

**Y16F(W):** [...] you always see the same people. I can't say much because I am not in it that long, but through all the meetings, the big meetings and events, there are always the same people. And most of them are the older generation that has been going there for a while [...] *Cymdeithas* actually wants more young people to join, but it is hard, it is hard today because of the situation may be, I think. They care less, young people.

**NDR:** *And why is that so?*

**Y16F(W):** I don't know, I really don't know. It might be television, or it might be the modern age, but I think it doesn't matter to anybody anymore. It is about the attitudes of a person. And those some of us means that someone cares, so we need to continue.

If a group of activists includes a low number of young people, those who belong to it tend to feel more responsible for the group's activities. On the other hand, lower numbers of young people in the world of activism may reflect the proportion of individuals who are ethnically aware and who speak the minority language. This young Breton activists says:

**O24F(B):** You always meet the same people, whether it's at events organized by the association, or you go to see a Breton play at the theatre or to *fest-noz*, there are the same faces. When I volunteered at the *Yaouank* festival, I met lots of people from my class and syndicate. You know? This world is really small [...], so everyone has to know one another.

This limited worldview of activists has two aspects. On the one hand, it could be due to the fact that there are not many people willing to fight for the cause supported by my interlocutors, which, in turn, can bring their languages and cultures to disappear. On the other hand, when young people are aware that most people they know are also engaged means they perceive those ties as strong, and they have a sense of belonging to a closely-knit community of individuals with similar views on issues they consider important. One of my interlocutors describes the circles of Kashubian activists:

**J21M(K):** This world [of Kashubian activists] is really diverse, but it's also very small. People who are engaged in their everyday lives probably number under a hundred. And I think that there probably aren't more people like that throughout Kashubia. [...] I think that more than anything [they are joined by] attachment to the region and a desire to act, some kind of progress. And this kind of common mission, which is to not allow all this to collapse, die, so that it can all be transmitted to the next generations. And the question of how it's done, with what awareness, and what other goals there might be, how it's talked about, that's a whole different question. Maybe it's good that something distinguishes these associations.

The young Kashub notes the existence of different kinds of engagement. People who organize and lead activities are few and far between. They also create a diverse cultural and social environment open for others to participate in. This Sorbian student has a similar view:

**P22M(S):** There's always the question of how someone is engaged. Some people are involved such that they often take part in things – they are everywhere all the time. Others are really active, they want to organize things or do things. I think there are more people who take part in some things, they are more defensive, but they support everything and have a positive attitude. I think there are more of them. The others could be counted on the fingers of both hands – those who are really active.

Leaders and active individuals are rare in all communities. Their role is to provide conditions and opportunities for people who do not have their own ideas, who are ethnically and linguistically undecided, so that as many as possible want to and

are able to join in with the activities on offer. As I have shown, active participation in cultural life and interactions with other engaged and interested individuals may lead them to reach new levels of cultural and social awareness and become actively involved in their community and its causes. This is the greatest success activists, including young people, can hope for. At the same time, however, they must answer the question: what culture do they want to support? In the contemporary world, this is not at all clear.