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**Maintaining cultural identity
Ethnic consciousness and institutional support
among young Upper Sorbs**

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My paper is based on the on-going field studies, which I started last year within the framework of a scholarship from the Sorbian Institute in Budyšin/Bautzen, among young people belonging to European linguistic minorities. This research is concerned with the influence of cultural animation on the ethnic attitudes of the young. This study concerns young people between the ages of 16 and 25 belonging to a minority group as a result of their ancestry or through their own choice. The age limit of these young people are the arbitrary choice of the researcher: they include people who are already conscious of the important decisions that they will have to make in their lives. Although, at the same time, they still have the possibility of taking part in other interests that give them a sense of satisfaction and which form their character and interpersonal relations. The younger European generation, particularly from the post-communist countries of Central Europe, is confronted with the large dilemmas presented by the influence of the surrounding world they now live in. They experience the relentless pressure of mobility, of competitiveness and the hegemony of English as a language that everyone should know to obtain any kind of viable place in society in the future. That is why their identity and language choices can-not be consider as simple.

Traditionally, cultural identity has been determined by birth and blood ties. One was a member of a given group because his/her parents belonged to it. The community constituted the only cultural context into which a person was born, raised, lived and died. There was no need to reflect on whether participation in another group would be profitable for an individual or not. The language used by the community was its only language, even during a period when the dominant political group in power prohibited it officially. The language – called today minority or ethnic – was closely connected to the way of life of the group, their activities and values. Only by using this language were people able to communicate and to express their feelings. However, this situation gradually began to change. Compulsory education, military service, the development of the railway, urbanization, and last but not least new media forms have lead to a gradual language shift of the minority members into the dominant language. Prior to this, community relations and the hermetic character of the group were broken down, and community members endured increasing, and rapid – both compulsory and voluntary – assimilation. The objective determinants of the cultural identity of minority participants became progressively less clear. In postmodern societies, group membership, the language used and cultural identity are constantly being negotiated. Individuals are able to decide for themselves whether they feel they belong to a given group or not. This is more the case today, because it is rare that the family and local community constitute the base and the major support in maintaining cultural identity. Children are taught minority languages in school rather than at home, and become familiar with community traditions during excursions and organized performances.

The classic typology of Ferdinand Tönnies can be helpful here to show differences between community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*).¹ This typology originates from the romantic philosophical tradition and was hitherto often criticized. The notions of ‘community’ and ‘society’ are difficult and could mean different things to people belonging to different traditions and cultures. Both these ideas are very strongly related to their popular meanings used in the discourse of ordinary people². Nevertheless, taking this into consideration, the Tönnies’ typology is still creative and cognitively important. Applying this typology it can be said that ethnic ties are becoming an increasingly less important domain of community life, while they are increasingly subject to creation within the associative life of a specific group. The cultural and social life of a minority today does not result only from territory and relations with a small community. It is the result of creation, cultural and linguistic politics, projections and calculation.

Statistical research conducted among the different ethnic minorities of Europe has revealed that the younger generation of a minority group is increasingly ‘ethnically undecided’. They identify themselves not only with the minority culture (especially those in whose homes people speak the minority language and within the area inhabited by concentrated minority groups, beyond cities), and with the dominant culture (in which they participate from birth and which is their basic point of reference), but also with the ‘global/general culture’ which constitutes an integral part of their lives. This ethnic indecision occurs generally as a result of modernization processes, globalization, changes in lifestyle, and the influence of new media. In the situation where identity choice is not determined by a group and participation in a minority is not obvious, the future of minority cultures and languages depends to a great extent on whether these young people wish to become involved in the life of the group, whether they will find value in being part of the group and whether their motivation is sufficient to overcome the price of such identification. However, to have aspirations in identifying with a minority group various needs have to be instilled in these young people: by the community – if it still exists – and/or through organized cultural and social activities. That is why it is necessary to examine what kind of factors, conditions, circumstances and activities are reasons young people want to engage in the ethnic life of a particular group, and what influences their identification processes.

In 2010 I conducted thirty open interviews with young people of the Upper Sorbian minority, and with young people who are active in the institutional life of the Sorbian minority and/or are animating the cultural life of young Upper Sorbian people. Accordingly, twelve of those interviewed were pupils from the 11th and 12th class in the Upper Sorbian High School (*Serbski gymnazij/Sorbisches Gymnasium*), and seven were students of Sorbian Studies at the University of Leipzig. I talked with eight young cultural animators and with three people working in the Upper Sorbian institutions conducting cultural/social projects targeted at young people. I have chosen only this small, Upper Sorbian, group as a subject of my research because of the very complicated situation in Lusatia. Not only are there two distinct languages there³, Upper and Lower Sorbs often perceive themselves as two distinct nations, but what is more, there are two different religious faiths: Protestant and Catholic, which had, and have, till this day an important

¹ Cf. Tönnies 2001.

² Cf. Cohen 1985; Crow, Allan 1994.

³ Recognized as such by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, ratified by Germany in 1998.

significance in the process of the maintenance of cultural identity. The intergenerational transmission of the language continues only in Catholic Upper Lusatia and most of the children are raised with Sorbian as their first language. Recent research conducted by Měrcin Walda of the Sorbian Institute confirm that in this small territory called, ‘Při Klósterskej wodže’ (‘Am Klosterwasser’), most people from all generations still speak the Upper Sorbian language⁴. What is more, a community based on cultural, linguistic and religious identity, exists and is quite strong there. Unfortunately, even there the intergenerational transmission of the language has become weaker, and young people are increasingly choosing German identity as more attractive and advantageous. It seems that there are two main causes for this choice. The first one concerns the low prestige of the Sorbian language and culture which is connected to discrimination against Sorbs, expressed by Germans in the form of malicious jokes (especially painful for young people), their unwillingness to hear the Sorbian language in public places or in the form of anti-Sorbian graffiti on the walls of buildings. What is important, this type of attitude concerns not only adults, but the young generation of Germans as well, who live very close to the Sorbs⁵. The second reason for this negative identification of choices of young Sorbs can be the result of the weak situation of the economy in Lusatia where young people are afraid that at the end of their studies they will not find a good job in their region and will have to move to other parts of Germany, or the world. This does not influence young people’s motivation positively to make an effort to engage themselves in the minority group and to learn the minority language. One of the pupils in the Sorbian High School final class is doubtful of the survival of the Sorbian culture:

(...) I think that this Americanization, Germanization, which is happening now... and the Sorbian language doesn’t give any benefits for the future, to have a better job or something.... So people’s motivation is not big, because what will it give to them to speak Sorbian. And most people think like this and not that they have to make a sacrifice in the name of the language. No one feels like doing this. Well, almost no one. – Male [M], Sorbisches Gymnasium [SG], 12 class.⁶

The direct inspiration of my research project was the work of the Czech ethnologist, Leoš Šatava, who conducted research among pupils of the Upper Sorbian High School at the end of the 20th century. The researcher asked the young people about the level of their identification both with the Sorbian and with German cultures; their feelings about the extent of the importance of maintaining the Sorbian language and Sorbian culture; their subjective assessment of their own command of Sorbian and/or German; and finally, their opinion about the situation of the Sorbs. The collected data is a representation of the changes that have taken place in the sociolinguistic situation in Lusatia: the weakening of the intergenerational transmission of Upper Sorbian, the younger Sorbian generation not only declares double Sorbian and German identity, but many young people (whose mother tongue is Sorbian, from Sorbian villages) perceive subjectively their linguistic abilities and their command of German as better than Sorbian. This is

⁴ Walde 2004: 3–27.

⁵ Cf. Ratajczak 2009: 3–15.

⁶ These citations are from interviews conducted in the Upper Sorbian language to conserve the oral aspect of the interviews and then translated into English.

symptomatic and quite alarming.⁷ What is more, the number of young people ethnically undecided is on the increase. Šatava concludes one of his articles with a statement, which is at the same time the departure point of my project. He writes:

“ (...) a large part of the young generation in Lusatia is ethnically undecided. What part of this “grey zone” will later, in their adult life, endorse the Sorbian ethnic consciousness, will determine the future of the Sorbs. The level of their “readiness for action” is another *sine qua non* component of their prospective survival.”⁸

The methodology of my research was, therefore, ethnographic, which included open interviews, active participation and collecting different types of material for young people and material made by them. Nevertheless, my study is inspired by sociolinguistics, especially by the work of American-Jewish researcher, Joshua A. Fishman. He created an eight-step scale, called the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, which shows the condition of a specified language and what types of activities should be undertaken in order to maintain/revitalize the minority language.⁹ In Fishman’s work endangered languages are always correlated with the community using them. He is conscious that the success of language revitalization depends on whether there are people who want and can use that language and transmit it to the next generation, so the threatened language must be strengthened at the family, community and neighborhood levels. That is why he considers point six the most important step in the scale: intergenerational transmission and existence of a community who would use the language. According to this, the future of minority languages depends to a great extent on whether today’s young people will want to use the languages and be able to transmit them to the next generation. This could be conditioned by the degree of their identification with the minority culture and on their ability to create the community.

The purpose of my research was to observe different projects targeted at young people from Upper Lusatia and to find what in the proposed activities was interesting and

⁷ Cf. Šatava 2005.

⁸ Šatava 1999: 100.

⁹ Stages of Reversing Language Shift: Severity of Intergenerational Dislocation (read from the bottom up)

1. Education, work sphere, mass media and governmental operations at higher and nationwide levels
 2. Local/regional mass media and governmental services.
 3. The local/regional (i.e. non-neighborhood) work sphere, both among Xmen and among Ymen.
 - 4b. Public schools for Xish children, offering some instruction via Xish, but substantially under Yish curricula and staffing control.
 - 4a. Schools in lieu of compulsory education and substantially under Xish curricular and staffing control.
- II. RLS to transcend diglossia, subsequent to its attainment*
5. Schools for literacy acquisition, for the old and for the young, and not in lieu of compulsory education.
 6. The intergenerational and demographically concentrated home-family-neighborhood: the basis of mother tongue transmission.
 7. Cultural interaction in Xish primarily involving the community-based older generation.
 8. Reconstructing Xish and adult acquisition of XSL.

I. RLS to attain diglossia (assuming prior ideological clarification)

Fishman 1997: 395.

absorbing for them, and what was not. I asked what were the reasons for their engagement in a group, what values they find in it, what kind of needs are satisfied by participation in this form of organized cultural life. I also had meetings at the same time with activists, originators of the programs, representatives of Sorbian institutions and organizations. I was interested in what – in their opinion – is important for today's young people and what they want to achieve through consecutive projects.

My previous research as well as contact with many representatives of European minorities, have convinced me that very often engagement in the minority group depends on chance; on whether a young person meets on his/her way through life someone who will be able to inspire them; who arouses in them an 'ethnic spirit'; whether they will find themselves in a group for whom participation in the minority culture is an important issue, etc. These observations have been confirmed by research concerning the participation of young people in civic and/or community life. This research points out that the most important influence on young people are the attitudes they acquire at home, participation in youth organizations and friendly relations with people already engaged in civic life¹⁰. The turning point in the life of a young person can be, in fact, a meeting with someone – an activist, an enthusiastic person. It can also be participation in a project, which triggers an interest in joining the ethnic life of a specific group. It can also be the influence of the milieu in which young people find themselves and the people with whom they become involved.

The milieu of young people belonging to a minority culture functions as the many different kinds of postmodern subcultures function and therefore is of great significance for adolescents.¹¹ Young people from minorities want to be like every other young person but at the same time (which is not a paradox, but is quite normal knowing young people) they want to be special. And here is perhaps a chance because participation in the minority culture gives them this possibility. It makes the moment of passage (*rite de passage*) and of becoming conscious of the willingness of being part of a group, even more important.

When the family and local community are no longer the central pillar supporting a cultural identity and children learn the minority language at school, the responsibility for the minority's survival shifts largely onto ethnic organizations and institutions. Very often during these organized activities and projects young people have a chance to become acquainted with other young people, establish social and friendly relations and become aware that there are many young people who share the same passions and interests. What is more: they see that using a minority language does not have to be related exclusively to the domains of home and school, and that it can provide them with certain advantages in the future.

In Upper Lusatia, numerous activities and projects are organized, the aim of which is to include young people in the conscious participation in the minority culture. We can say that different community initiatives may have two types of origin: top-down activities (from central/regional government) and ground-up activities (initiated by local people)¹². In providing an initial description of these projects, we can divide them into several groups:

- 1) Official projects, conducted by institutions, including large campaigns, linguistic and cultural politics. In Lusatia the most important role is played by the Domowina,

¹⁰ Caraveo et al. 2010: 142.

¹¹ Cf. Muggleton 2006: 33–80.

¹² Willmott 1989: 23.

- the umbrella organization of Sorbian societies and associations, which also sets itself the goal of defending the democratic and national interests of the Sorbs as well as maintaining the Sorbian language and culture. Among others the Domowina has projects targeted at young people (anti-discrimination campaigns, general cultural politics for the young). The second important institution is the Witaj Language Center, which provides many diverse school and after-school programs for young people.
- 2) Official organizations intentionally for young people. There are few organizations in Lusatia developing programs chiefly for young Sorbs. One is the Youth Association Pawk, which organises projects in different areas of interest – sport, music and entertainment, international meetings with representatives of young people from other European minorities, educational projects, etc. There are some sport associations (in the Domowina and not affiliated with the Domowina), in Sorbian villages. The role of sport is very important for young people. It has a strong influence on their relations with other members of the team and reinforces the group identity especially when playing against non-Sorbian teams. Another institution, the Sorbian Gymnasium, plays an important role, not only educational, but also as a place where many different youth activities are organized.
 - 3) Official student organizations. There are two Sorbian students' clubs: in Leipzig (Sorabija) and in Dresden (Bjarnat Krawc). They play a very important community role: they facilitate meetings of Sorbian students, giving them opportunities to do something jointly (cultivating Sorbian traditions as well as discos with Sorbian music), and to speak the Sorbian language.
 - 4) Official and non-official projects of a local range. In almost every Sorbian village there are a few cultural Sorbian groups (dance, music, theater, folklore), often associated with the school. Many Sorbian children and young people participate in some of these groups as music and Sorbian traditions are very important aspects of Sorbian identity.
 - 5) Official projects both for people from dominant and minority cultures. Their role could be very important in Upper Lusatia because of the many problems between Germans and Sorbs, but in fact, it is not. There are actually almost no projects for German and Sorbian young people. There are some important organizations such as the Catholic Deanery in Upper Lusatia in which Germans and Sorbs participate, but in most cases the two groups are separate and have different meetings. There are as well people working in local institutions who conduct on their own initiative activities for young people from minority groups. A positive example of this work is Michał Cyż from Sächsischer Ausbildungs- und Erprobungskanal (SAEK) in Bautzen. Although the number of Sorbian participants in all the programs constitutes a very small percentage of the total Bautzen population, he has created groups in which the working-language is Upper Sorbian.
 - 6) Non-official activities, particularly modern musical bands, are very popular in both groups. Modern music plays an important role in the identification processes of young people. There are also different types of initiatives from local animators e.g. searching for oral history memories to become acquainted with the past of the ethnic community.
 - 7) Non-official groups of a local range. In Lusatia there is a long tradition of Youth Clubs (Jugendclubs) in almost every Sorbian village, a place where young people meet to discuss, have a beer, play cards, watch TV together etc. Although these clubs are not 'ethnic' clubs, sometimes they play an important role (it depends if

there is someone with the initiative to inspire the young people): young people invent cultural projects, and – what is most important – they create a community.

The essential part of my research project is focused on interviews with young people and with workers and volunteers from Sorbian institutions, organizations and associations who organise cultural projects for young people as well as with cultural animators, ethnic enthusiasts and people who are able to inspire teenagers and make them feel a part of a minority group. During these interviews a few key issues have emerged which seem to me particularly interesting in the context of a project concerning the attitudes of the younger generation to their culture and language and the influence of organized activities for the maintenance of their ethnic identity. Below are the comments I received from the participants within the topics during the interviews with young Sorbs.

Tradition/modernity

The first topic concerns the views of young people concerning Sorbian culture: what they find interesting in it, and what they do not. This question is particularly important, because if the minority culture does not seem to appeal to young people, it is difficult for them to identify with this culture and to find in it something interesting, which would make them want to participate in it. The world is changing constantly, every culture is in constant flux, and cultural identity is not fixed, once and for all. The debate between tradition and modernity is a frequent issue in anthropological studies. For many years minority cultures were perceived only from the perspective of opposition to the dominant/national culture. I think that this reasoning is increasingly less justifiable. Young people identify themselves simultaneously with different cultures or even sub-cultures, in this case, with a German and a Sorbian one. They can be fans of ‘heavy metal’ music and will be part of an interest group with other fans, often not only from Lusatia or Germany but from all parts of the world. They belong to a folklore group and at the same time they are interested in sport. They are looking for a job, are worried about their future, and with that concern they form connections with other young people, independent of where they originate. They belong to different social groups, acquire different life experiences, and have friends with different interests. All these – and many other factors – form their complex cultural identity.

The concept of ‘transculturality’ has been present in philosophy and in anthropology for the last few decades. Wolfgang Welsch, German philosopher, wrote that today cultures are very interconnected and entangled with each other and that in every single culture other cultures become its internal content. He went as far as to state that in our present world the choice between foreign and self culture does not exist any longer.¹³ Another researcher focusing on modernity, Arjun Appadurai, looks at today’s world as a constellation of drifting elements of culture, tired of its traditional background, people and social groups, because their references are not the local culture anymore, but global, the omnipresent content of mass culture. Appadurai uses the notion of ‘ethnoscapes’ to describe the complexity of today’s culture. ‘Ethnoscape’ is therefore, “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an es-

¹³ Welsch 1999.

sential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree”.¹⁴ The minority culture does not exist separately from the dominant one. It connects with many other cultures coexisting not only in a specific territory, but across the world. The struggle with internal multiculturalism of young people cannot be won. Therefore it is very important that minority cultures do not become fossilized, do not become exhibitions in an ethnographic museum, but are made opportune to the needs of teenagers raised in our trans-cultural and trans-medial world.

Many young people with whom I have spoken share these uncertainties. A pupil in the last class of the Sorbian High School said:

I think that some Sorbs are too conservative and they are afraid of modern culture. And they obstruct others from changing anything, not developing. And I think that this is not good for Sorbian culture, because we are at the same time normal, young people. There is not supposed to be such dissonance between our German and our Sorbian life. It can damage our culture. – Female [F], SG, 12 class.

I have heard other similar opinions about the conservatism of Sorbian culture and its resistance to adapting to the requirements of the modern world. My observations during several years’ research in Lusatia have confirmed in addition that Sorbian culture is not open to other cultures and lifestyles. Many Sorbs want it to stay as it was before WW2, but this is not possible because the lifestyle of Sorbs has changed and cannot return to the calm, rural past. During my research in Upper Lusatia I very often had a feeling that in this culture, apart from the domain of customs and traditions constituting the visual dimension of this culture, there is not much more. This is especially evident, when we compare Sorbian culture with Breton culture, which is on the path to development, change and energy.

That is why the interviews and meetings with young Sorbs were so interesting for me. They point out clearly the existence in Sorbian culture of a somewhat paradoxical situation: young people are unwillingly observers in the traditional Sorbian customs which seem to them fossilized and archaic. They feel the ‘Others’ are looking at them in a strange way and perceive them as old-fashioned and outdated. But when from observer they become active participants, all those customs, traditions and routines are for them living and important. Participation in this sphere of Sorbian life develops stronger ties with other Sorbs. I would like to quote two young people:

I don’t like going to folk concerts, and don’t really like the atmosphere there, but I like a lot giving those kinds of concerts, for example with our choir. During concerts it is usually boring and stuffy, there is nothing to do. But in general I like this music and I like the songs that they sing. That’s why I sing them myself. When we give a concert, we have a good time, great fun and we can show something. – M, SG, 11 class.

It is hard to say what I don’t like in Sorbian culture. Maybe these dances. But actually... the Catholicism makes me nervous, that everyone must do this. But I am Catholic myself and it is important for me. Although, Sorbs are very rigorous with respect to this. And the second thing is this Sorbian dress, which is uncomfortable and it is so hot wearing it. But on the other hand... I like it, it is beautiful – Nevertheless, I had the time of my life when I was rebelling against wearing this dress.

¹⁴ Appadurai 1996: 33.

Because people were looking at me strangely and it made me nervous. But now I see that there are people who say that I look good in this dress. And I have no more problems with it. – F, SG, 12 class.

The discourse of young Sorbs is built on the oppositions between modernity and tradition, between fear and fascination, boredom and responsibility. There is a constant fear that can be found in the opinions of young people that if Sorbian culture was not interesting enough, young people would turn away from it. On the other hand the protection and maintenance of Sorbian traditions are very important for them:

I listen to folk music only during religious festivals when I have no choice. Obviously, this is very nice and so on, but if I don't have to, I don't do it willingly.[...] I like a lot Sorbian music concerts, especially modern Sorbian music. There is one group in our youth club playing metal music with Sorbian texts. And I think it is super. Many young people listen to this. I like this kind of combination. *N.D.-R.: And you feel it is important that Sorbian culture modernizes itself?* I think... on the one hand, yes, it is important that it is not artificial, but that there is a need of a kind of creativity... To make people want to protect this culture still. But on the other hand... this relation with old Sorbian traditions must be maintained. I always participate in Sorbian customs. – F, SG, 12 class.

I find it very interesting that traditional culture based on customs, dressing in traditional costumes, which are not worn by anyone in everyday life, exist alongside the modern dimension of the Sorbian culture. The division between those who 'create' and those who 'participate' in it practically does not exist:

These spheres are very often mixed – the same people perform in folk groups, dance Sorbian dances dressed in traditional costumes, and then they create modern music, like hip-hop or something. There is nothing strange for us in this. Nobody has a problem with it. And I really like the fact that we don't have to separate it. – F, Language Witaj Centre activist.

Consciousness/enlightenment/engagement

Young people who are engaged within Sorbian culture (we can observe the same attitudes in young people of other minorities) are extremely conscious of the problems concerning their culture and the dangers it faces. And thus they feel that they are responsible for the future of Sorbian culture. Listening to the statements of teenagers from the Sorbian High School and young people studying at the Leipzig University, one could have the impression that they really feel the weight of responsibility on their shoulders. And this pressure determines their lives. I will quote a few comments regarding the sense of responsibility for the future of Sorbian culture and the conviction of young people that its future depends on their conduct. It is worth paying attention to the discourse of these young people: the way they express responsibility for Sorbian culture and the role they have already accepted of those who are expected to animate other people, to convincing them to participate actively in the culture. And we must not forget that these are really young people.

I would say that yes, I am responsible. When I wear Sorbian dress, speak Sorbian, and I want to transmit the language to my kids, everyone has an influence. Some people don't care, but I would say everybody is a little responsible for this culture surviving. – F, SG, 12 class.

For example when I tell other people about Sorbian culture, I can say good or bad things. And it matters if I speak positively or negatively. Or if I speak with my children in Sorbian or in German, it has an influence as well. Because not to speak Sorbian, is against the Sorbs. Because my kids won't know the language and probably won't have much in common with this culture. – M, SG, 12 class.

In this declared responsibility we can hear that young people are afraid for the future of Sorbian culture and language; the end will come when Sorbs stop becoming involved in maintaining Sorbian culture. In other words, the fundamental question is whether Sorbian culture can exist by itself, without any external support, or it has to be animated from top-down. Ewa Nowicka, Polish sociologist, has written: "Today everyone who wants to belong to a minority culture must intentionally espouse it. In addition, to be a participant in the minority culture, one must represent something himself/herself and to other people: to know and to manifest knowledge of the language, customs, history and traditions of the group or to be an activist or member of an ethnic organization".¹⁵ Since belonging to Sorbian culture is not based exclusively on blood ties or ancestry, it cannot be taken lightly. Every member, regardless of how they were 'born' into Sorbian culture, can choose identification with German culture. That is why every Sorb should manifest the fact that in some way he/she belongs to this minority culture.

What I do, my activities, have some influence on Sorbian culture. Because the culture can stay alive only when it is living in the people, when it is important for people, when they connect with it, every day, in their own way. When they are conscious of their culture. Many people do not involve themselves. And I think it is related to national identity. When one does nothing, participating in nothing, would he be able to transmit the culture to the next generations? I want everybody to see that I have my language, in which I speak, and my culture, which is not inferior to the German one. – M, student, 20 years old.

I have found it is important that young people realize that during the process of encouraging them to participate and to identify with the minority culture sincerity of intentions plays a crucial role. If an activist does not really believe in his/her projects and effectiveness, they will not be able to instill in young people the positive consequences of participation:

I hope that what I am doing has some influence on Sorbian culture, and this is my main motivation. If I see, that it doesn't, what's the point of going any further? I think that it is very important to present Sorbian culture positively, as something important and interesting. To make people know that others are really fascinated with it. And when they start to understand that we don't do it because we have to, but because we love it and it's great fun, it can be a signal for others that 'oh yes, it is important for them, makes them happy, so it's ok'. And then, when someone understands, it will be easier for him to do something together with others for the culture

¹⁵ Nowicka 2007: 98.

and have a good time with it as well. Because people have to understand by themselves how important it is. You can't force someone. They have to see it and do it their own way and have a bit of fun. This is the most important. – M, student, 21 years old.

For the purpose of comparison it is interesting to present some of the statements of young Sorbian activists about the necessity of engagement in Sorbian culture and sense of responsibility for its survival as well as the effective instilling of the needs and willingness of identification with it in the younger generation:

Yes, I feel responsible for Sorbian culture. I can't say that I don't have time for it, that someone else should do it. Because everyone can say this. If everyone says this, nothing will happen and there will be a catastrophe. That is why I want to do something, get my friends in it, take part in some task, transmit it to my children so they will be conscious as well of their responsibility. And I think that we have to tell the Germans so they know who we are. Everyone should know who he is and transmit it to others, who the Sorbs are. And I think that this is the duty of every Sorb, to talk about it. – F, Pawk activist.

One of the most interesting questions concerning the conscious involvement of young people in the minority language is their motivations: why do they do it? Why do they devote their time to cultural activities instead of pursuing a career or taking time out with their friends? A statement from a Sorbian activist seems to explain this:

I think that everybody does it in the first place as a bit of fun, because they like it. It's the motivation to participate in it, to sing, play, and organize something. But of course, it has some influence on people and maybe afterwards it makes it easier for them to speak Sorbian, to admit to being a Sorb. It is clearer for people who are not from Catholic families from Upper Lusatia, for whom being Sorbian is very natural. We have one girl here, who was learning Sorbian at school, but it was very hard for her. She was living in a place where practically nobody spoke Sorbian anymore and she didn't like it actually. And in our band she started to speak Sorbian and now she is quite good at it. And she identifies with our culture, of course much more than she did before coming to us. – M, Sorbian activist, musician.

Looking at participation in a minority culture as we do at participation in the subculture of the younger generation, we observe that young people do not do this just to devote themselves to a future within an 'imagined community'.¹⁶ Their prime motivation is being together with other people with the same interests and enthusiasm; involving their lives in something apart from school and family life. As a result of this engagement in a minority culture they feel that they are doing something interesting and important, that they are not ordinary people anymore but they have a special mission. This commitment creates important and close relations with other young people, who feel and think similarly. A great deal of sociological research has shown that peer and friendship relations as well as giving support are some of the most important requirements of young people. This need is used by cultural animators:

¹⁶ Cf. Anderson 1991.

For me the most important is to create small groups within which people establish close contacts. In this group people feel they are Sorbs. In my opinion this motivation is very important for Sorbian culture. Motivation at home, from friends, to make young people join and act in some associations. – M, Sorbian activist, musician.

Participation in the cultural life

The third question is connected and stems from the citation above. It concerns the interdependence between taking part in cultural life and identification with the minority culture. Here I would like to quote three longer transcripts from young people about how they started their active participation in the minority culture. It is also connected with their motivation to become involved in maintaining the Sorbian culture/language in their future life. These interviews prove the hypothesis that membership in a minority culture which necessitates authentic participation, and engagement and not just observing the culture from the outside, is the reason for a genuine commitment to a specific group. It provides the motivation, and sometimes even something akin to a moral necessity to become involved in the culture and to sensitize others to do the same:

- 1) I joined the dance group because I had a good friend and his parents told him to enroll in this group. And he didn't want to go there alone, so he asked me to go with him. So I did. At first it wasn't really interesting, but after a while became really drawn and then I asked them to enroll me in the group. I really liked it, we were a good team doing lots of things together. And it was great fun. Those dances and meeting people. It has become my passion. And when we were performing, traveling to performances or something, I realized how lively this culture is. – M, student, 21 years old.
- 2) In primary school we were very active. Our director and her husband prepared a kind of musical spectacle with us [...] with many Sorbian figures and symbols. [...] We had a lot of rehearsals, great costumes, it was almost a theatre performance. Everybody had a Sorbian personage. And we were singing and playing. And we were performing not only in Lusatia. We were in Poland, Czech Republic, in different places in Germany. It was fantastic that we were doing it together, and we had really close relations. [...] – M, SG, 11 class.
- 3) I think that in our class [in the Sorbian High School] everybody was active, and some even very active. And then the school started to live Sorbian culture to a greater extent. It was contagious. The ideas were born spontaneously, when we were sitting together and discussing the interesting things we could do. It wasn't just the one person, there was a lot of energy in our group, and atmosphere, we really wanted it. And it was really working. Then a lot of pupils started to be more enthusiastic. And then it turned out that all of us, those who were participating wanted to transmit the traditions. For example here, in Leipzig. – F, student, 23 years old.

Every interview presents different, often decisive moments in a young person's life. The moment in their lives when they begin to perceive their own culture from a different perspective. Of course, these processes are different in the case of people raised in Sorbian families who were using the Sorbian language in everyday communication and where the family was the base of the cultural socialization of a child. In these cases the

moment of ‘passage’ concerns a conscious willingness to act for the future of the community. However, for young people for whom Sorbian identity was not important, even if they knew the Sorbian language from home or school but were only using it when they had to, participation in cultural projects and meeting cultural activists can be decisive. Some people engaged with work with young people, analyzing their commitment detect that very often participation in cultural or social projects functions on an “aha effect” basis. It comes like a blinding flash, which shows you how to resolve a difficult problem which you had not been able to resolve for months.

Of course, not everybody who participated in Pawk’s projects act in this way. But they often say: this project was good, I was happy to do this, and it was good to meet other Sorbs. A lot of information spread through private relations, meeting people who say: it was cool, it gave me a lot. And then they talk about it in their village, when meeting their friends and encouraging them. – F, Pawk activist.

Community/society and cultural animation/cultural broadening

The influence of animation activities on the attitudes of young people can-not be over-estimated. Initially, these kinds of activities have tie-creating significance. Connections between young people, both those who were raised in Sorbian culture and those for whom this is an acquired culture, through participation in common projects these strong and specific ties start to be established. Applying Ferdinand Tönnies theory we can use the designation, ‘community ties’. A community is based on feelings which join individuals, creating a common identity, emotional intimacy and include all the aspects of their lives. These kinds of ties have a particular significance for young people for whom friendship and the company of others are more important and stronger than for adults. Young people will quite willingly take part in a minority culture and will commit themselves to it when they know that for other people, their friends, it is important. Meanwhile, ‘society ties’ (*Gesellschaft*) are based on common targets, on rational calculations and agreements. They join individuals mostly as part of the social roles they play. The aim of some projects is therefore to make young people reflect on why ‘is it worth’ becoming involved in work for a minority culture? What profit will I get from it?

Ferdinand Tönnies argued that community ties pertain to an enclosed cultural world in which every member knows his/her role and place, and who participate in group-life because this is their natural milieu based on strong relations with other members of that particular world. But the industrial revolution, the influence of the new media, urbanization and cultural contact with other groups has caused the loosening of these ties which were no longer based on feeling and emotions, but rather on agreements, profit, organized structures, thus, on society ties. However, as was said at the beginning of this article, we should not consider the Tönnies’ theory in its literal sense. Minority cultures subjected to intentional activities for their preservation, are based in general on ‘society ties’ and their basic supporting structures are different state organizations and institutions (cultural, political, educational etc.). This does not mean that because of these organized activities, important and emotive (‘community’) ties are not created. In the modern world ‘community ties’ play a very important role (though different than in the pre-industrial world). And these types of relations have a special meaning for young people. They facilitate the creation of a group which is then the base of language transmission without which maintaining the minority culture is very difficult if not impossi-

ble¹⁷. The testimony of these young people is an indication of what motivates them to participate in Sorbian culture. In fact, what attracts them to create durable relations is the community aspect of these activities:

Every Sorbian festivity [in Leipzig] is organized by the Sorabija Club, but it doesn't mean that we are not meeting each others privately. We do, all the time. We try to live in one place, going to dances together etc. (...) Or when we organize some sport competitions, often the Sorbs are in one team, it's not deliberate, it just happens like this. – M, student, 24 years old.

Because you know, this community [*zhromadnosć* in Upper Sorbian – N.D.-R.] is very important for our culture. Because... I don't know... Because someone can see and understand that he is not alone with this culture and language... that there is a group who do it. It's like this in church as well. When you participate in the Sorbian Mass, and then go to the German Mass, you can see the difference. During the Sorbian Mass everyone is singing, they are close to each other. During the German one it is like everyone is alone. You can see it. – F, SG, 12 class.

This community dimension of the projects is also perceived as the most important by young Sorbian activists who are trying to carry out the project in a way that will inspire young people and make them want to accomplish something more:

So, through these projects we want to create relations between young people. And this is our most important mission. Because it is obvious that when someone has mostly German friends, he will speak German, and not Sorbian. This is quite clear. And we, through these projects and meetings, want to make it easier to meet other people, so that they can create relationships, and a community, to find friends. – F, Pawk activist.

While community ties are created by being together and the feeling of forming a real group, society projects are those thanks to which young people begin to perceive that being a part of a minority group allows them to profit in a sense from the situation. And, to a great extent, young people have a practical turn of mind. Raised in the Sorbian culture, very conscious of their duty and responsibility for the future of the Sorbian language and culture, they quite willingly talk about the positive values resulting from interpersonal relations and the exceptional quality of their culture. When not asked directly, they are very aware of the possibilities of taking advantage of the use of the Sorbian language or identifying with Sorbian: if they would be able to find a job (a large percentage of young people involved in Sorbian culture correlate its future with work in Sorbian education or in Sorbian institutions) and if it will be possible to stay in Lusatia or if they will have to leave to search for employment and a 'better' life:

I think, I hope that my Sorbian can be useful in the future. I would like to work with kids, so I could work in a Sorbian kindergarten. – F, SG, 12 class.

I think that the Sorbian language will always play a very important role in my life, for example if I become a teacher, I would like to teach in Sorbian schools. Or I could work in the Sorbian House, or in *Serbski rozhlós* (...) – M, SG, 11 class.

¹⁷ Fishman 1997: 92–95.

The difference between activities targeted at community relations and those creating society ties is comparable to the relation between cultural animation¹⁸ and culture broadening. For cultural animation the main assumption is not to impose contents on an individual, not to give him/her ready answers, but to give them the conviction that the group working together possesses its own cultural character, which thanks to this, work and activities in common can be introduced and activated. This particular kind of participation in a minority culture which is created through animation activities, in every case has a unique character and allows the individual participant the possibility of deciding what is interesting for him/her in a culture, what gives them a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment and motivates them to propose and take part in other activities. The basic element of cultural animation is, therefore, 'participation' – without participation any activities lose their momentum.¹⁹ This aspect distinguishes animation activities from observer contribution at performances and festivals. Participation produces a feeling of togetherness, with the possibility of changing some of the aspects of the reality around a culture with a real influence on the course of events. Observation only allows a view of a performance but does not permit direct engagement in the event.

We cannot, however, ignore the importance of 'society' organized relations and projects. Ewa Nowicka criticizing this phenomenon called the using of ethnicity and its visual symptoms, "ethnicity for sale"²⁰, behind which there is not much left. However, listening to young people and observing the processes of becoming involved in a minority culture in different European groups, I came to the conclusion that even financial support can be a good point of departure in the durable identification of a group where this financial aid acts for the continuation of a minority culture. Here we have to consider that even activities of a 'community' character belong to the world of 'society' if they do not arise from emotive ties existing between people by virtue of their shared territory or common ancestry. They are the subject of creation so follow the calculations and strategies typical of the world of 'society'. Their impact and significance are very important, and the ties and connections established as a result of this influence, can (but do not have to) be important and transcend primal assumptions.

Internal multiculturalism is a common phenomenon. It denotes the situation of a person who identifies himself/herself with more than one culture at the same time, often speaking and thinking in more than one language. As a multicultural being is not the sum of a one-culture population, cultural identification is not a mask that we can put on choosing one of the ways of communicating according to the milieu and circumstances. We do not abandon other experiences and values when thinking in a language and feeling part of a group. Hence, every multilingual person identifying with a minority culture has a hybrid identity. Every choice we make has an influence on our lives, on its diverse aspects even those which are seemingly not involved in our day to day routines. This is how the phenomenon of globalization and locality may be two simultaneous consequences coming from one process. Contrary to prognoses concerning the development of the global economy, societies and transitory modes did not cause a decline in local cultures. On the contrary – minorities not only continue but even strengthen their efforts to maintain their cultural specifics, their religion, customs and traditions. Hybridity has thus become a way to recreate and improve a local culture by incorporating elements of outside cultures, by belonging to different groups and accepting, in part, the global

¹⁸ Cf. *Animacja kultury* 2002.

¹⁹ Godlewski 2002: 64.

²⁰ Nowicka 2006: 295–296.

culture. Hybridity therefore permits the maintenance of the local culture within the framework of the global culture.²¹

However, not every individual, even one raised in a multicultural milieu, can consciously identify with a minority culture. In order to do so, belonging to a minority should provide principles, which in different circumstances would be hard to attain. These could be motivations of a financial nature (finding better/more interesting jobs thanks to a knowledge of the minority language), social (meeting friends) or personal (internal development, feeling that one is doing something important in one's life). These motivations are best reflected in the words of one Sorbian activist:

It's like this. First of all we are humans, than we are Sorbs. And when our needs are satisfied (food, sleep, work, dignity), then we can become involved in Sorbian culture. Thanks to this, you know, I feel good as a person as well. I mean, I do it to make me feel good. Because this is my cultural context, this is my social life. So if I have a chance to be in it, I'm happy with it. And I can do what I like. – M, Sorbian activist.

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²¹ Smith 2008: 5–6.

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Die Erhaltung kultureller Identität. Ethnisches Bewusstsein und institutionelle Förderung junger Obersorben

Zusammenfassung

Eine der größten Herausforderungen, mit der sich jede ethnische und sprachliche Minderheit konfrontiert sieht, ist die Sicherung der Kontinuität. Nur so kann es gelingen, dass die Sprache weiterhin angewendet und das Bewusstsein der Gruppenzugehörigkeit bewahrt wird. In der heutigen Welt, die von Migration, neuen Medien sowie sozialen und demografischen Problemen geprägt ist, genügt es meist nicht mehr, die Verantwortung für die Erziehung der jungen Generation allein den Eltern zu überlassen. Die jungen Leute unterliegen weit stärkeren kulturellen Einflüssen als frühere Generationen. Sie leben in einer transkulturellen Welt, wechseln leichter den Wohnort, sind eher Weltbürger als Bewohner einer „Heimat“. Die Wahl der ethnischen Identität, das Bewusstsein der Zugehörigkeit zu einer bestimmten Kultur und der Verantwortung dafür ist weniger Resultat der Erziehung in der Familie, sondern hängt in hohem Maße ab von Handlungen und Unternehmungen, an denen junge Menschen beteiligt sind, z. B. von Freunden mit ähnlichen Interessen, von spezifischen Werten einer Minderheitenkultur.

Der Beitrag enthält den Bericht von einer kulturwissenschaftlichen Feldforschung in der Oberlausitz im Jahr 2010. Die Analyse stützt sich auf Interviews, die mit jungen Sorben im Alter von 16–25 Jahren geführt wurden.