



CEZARY KURKOWSKI

ORCID 0000-0001-9634-1480

KATARZYNA BIAŁOBRZESKA

ORCID 0000-0003-4105-2475

## Barriers to the activation of social forces stimulated by participation in social and cultural projects

Bariery w aktywizacji sił społecznych pobudzanych w ramach uczestnictwa w projektach społeczno-kulturalnych

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### Introduction

The modern inhabitants of Warmia and Mazury create a post-immigration community that was formed as a result of the influx of various groups of people to these areas after the end of World War II. After 1945, the existing state, political, economic, religious, population and national relations in these territories changed significantly, and the communities inhabiting these areas are characterized by multiculturalism and a diversified attitude to their place of residence.

The Warmians and the Mazurians are a less integrated community and less involved in building a civil society and developing their small homelands. In connection with the above, many social and cultural projects are implemented in Warmia and Mazury to stimulate local communities to more intense activity.

To examine the conditions related to both the motivating factors for participation in the project and the barriers to the activation of social forces in the environment through participation in project activities of a socio-cultural nature, it is impossible not to take into account the knowledge of socio-historical conditions. The influence of these conditions is of key importance for understanding the formation of a new regional identity of Warmia and Mazury. Significant factors affecting civil society activity in Warmia and Mazury also include the socio-economic situation of the region, which contributes to

a range of existential problems related to poverty, unemployment, migration, communication exclusion, demographic ageing etc.

This article aims to show the factors that motivate people to participate in projects of a socio-cultural nature and to analyze the barriers to the stimulation and sustainability of social forces among the participants of these projects. The presented research results regarding the analysis of barriers to social activation of Warmians and Mazurians make up a part of a larger study, which concerned the determinants of social activation of the respondents through their participation in socio-cultural project activities. When trying to define the subject of the research, it was concluded that an important area within which processes discovering, activating or supporting social forces in local communities may appear is the area of activities defined as project activities, with particular emphasis on socio-cultural projects. Social impacts resulting from the implementation of this type of activity in the field, in this case in the region of Warmia and Mazury, are therefore the subject of the undertaken research.

The implementation of the presented research intentions required the formulation of questions that allowed for a multilateral recognition of the subject of the study. This article will present the results of the research that answer the research questions:

1. What were the reasons why the respondents applied to participate in projects of a socio-cultural nature?
2. What barriers, in the opinion of the respondents, make it difficult to awaken social forces in local communities?

The answers to the questions posed during the research are the basis for recognizing the basic conditions related to the factors that make it difficult to stimulate social forces in local environments under the conditions of project activities.

The subject matter and nature of the undertaken issues required the adoption of a research strategy that respects its multifaceted nature. The initial assumption was to recognize the opinions of participants of the projects to which they are addressed. The basic method used was traditional survey research (Babbie 2007, pp. 267–301), which made it possible to discover trends in the studied areas and to observe their changes depending on selected factors. Carrying out this activity required planning a specific method of constructing research tools, which would allow for the preparation of the above-mentioned lists. For the study, a proprietary research tool was developed: a survey questionnaire addressed to project participants. The anonymous survey was conducted in

the period from October to December 2018. 86% of respondents completed a paper questionnaire, while the remaining 14% of respondents completed the same questionnaire, but on-line, via the free Google Forms web application. The analysis of quantitative data collected during the questionnaire research was carried out using adequate methods of descriptive statistics. The sampling was non-probabilistic. It was a deliberate selection, so it was based on making choices of specific criteria adopted by the researcher and based on knowledge about the studied population and under the set goal of the study (Babbie 2007, pp. 204–205). Non-probabilistic sampling is a popular type of sampling, often used in social research. This project concerned the selection of a pool of socio-cultural projects carried out in 2008-2018 in small towns in the Warmia and Mazury region. In this respect, the research sample consisted of all persons participating in selected projects. Taking into account the nature of this selection, during the analysis of the obtained empirical material, particular care was taken in generalizing the conclusions from the data obtained (Babbie 2007). 175 participants of socio-cultural projects participated in the research carried out in villages and small towns of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship.

### Warmia and Mazury – a cultural melting pot

Warmia and Mazury is a region that over the centuries has undergone many political and administrative changes, and thus also social changes. Composed of two separate historical lands – Warmia and Mazury – it is now perceived as a whole, which was initiated by the post-war treatment of this region as the Recovered Territories. The post-war period seems to be the most cognitively important for building a new regional identity of contemporary Warmia and Mazury, because since 1945 in these lands the existing state, political, economic, religious, population and national relations have changed significantly, and inhabitant communities have created a kind of cultural melting pot. In the post-war period, the mosaic of people of various territorial origins in the Warmian-Masurian region was constantly changing. It was made up of four main ethnic groups. The largest community were people displaced from central Poland, mainly from the Kurpie region and Mazovia (about 25% of the incoming population). The borderland population, consisting of repatriates from the Vilnius and Volhynia regions (about 22% of the settlers), was represented in the same number. The third-largest group was the native population (approx. 18% of the population). The fourth group is the Ukrainian population from the

south of Poland, transferred in 1947 as part of the “Vistula” operation, which accounted for about 10% of the population (Domagała, Sakson 1998). This ethnic and cultural mosaic was complemented by Belarusians and Roma (Sakson 1998, p. 152). Contemporary inhabitants of Warmia and Mazury form a post-immigration community which was formed as a result of the influx of various groups of people to these areas. Concerning local and regional communities, it should be emphasized that they are not the continuators of the regional structures and traditions found on the spot or those brought by individual groups of the immigrant population. Contemporary Warmia and Mazury are still in the process of building a new regional identity; in a process that has its specificity dictated to a large extent by historical conditions. Therefore, there is a great need to stimulate pro-integration and socio-cultural activities in this region. Given the above, the assessment of the role of socio-cultural project activities aimed at stimulation of social forces in the environment of villages and small towns in Warmia and Mazury, presented in the article, is of particular importance.

#### Animating social activity and social forces in the environment – between passivity and activity

In animating social activity and social forces, activities serving the common, collective, but also individual good are just as important. The role of animation is to support self-development, the individuality of an individual, supporting self-organization of groups and social environments and stimulating self-governance in the local community. The practical translation of the idea of animation can be found in such a way of action that stimulates, encourages and mobilizes individuals, groups, social environments, and local communities to independently decide, design and implement activities aimed at satisfying their own needs correlating with values (Schindler 2004, p. 23). In many local communities, there is a need for the presence of (re)animation and social (re)animators, the need for actions that awake hidden social forces and dynamize visible ones, leading to overcoming passivity, home-centrism, egocentrism and alienation (Żebrowski 2003, p. 20).

It can be concluded that social changes concerning the region of Warmia and Mazury after World War II are the background for changes in the local dimension. When analysing the community of Warmia and Mazury, one can notice both features of its stability and changeability. This approach was

presented interestingly by Paweł Rybicki: “The community lasts and the community changes. (...) the social reality is never given in some constant, ideal of a static approach to a corresponding figure. It is always the course of something that is happening, which is subject to changes, no matter how small, elusive, seemingly unimportant” (Rybicki 1976, p. 546). According to Marian Golka, socio-cultural changes occur under the influence of two sources of changes: endogenous, i.e. internal to a given society and its culture, and exogenous, i.e. external to a given society and its culture. Social and cultural changes have been favoured by many different conditions, such as: changing living conditions, economic changes, changing social needs, changing generations, the state authority revealing reform ambitions, the influence of technology and methods and means of communication. Factors that do not serve to change or even inhibit them include: the relative persistence of certain human biological features and needs, and thus certain patterns of behaviour and ideas; individual desire for security, a sense of stability; immanent features of socio-cultural systems etc. (Golka 2012, pp. 31, 46–47).

As Antonina Gurycka (1976, p. 5) points out, both social activity and passivity can be perceived in three ways: as a sporadic reaction, as a reaction conditioned by a situation or a more or less permanent human quality. People’s passivity or activity may be determined in many ways. Undoubtedly, the factors that dynamise human behaviour are the needs that determine the motives. Another factor that determines the existence and strength of human activity or passivity is the system of values, that is, “a system of cognitive categories used to describe and evaluate the world, which is expressed by the fact that a person considers certain facts, objects, phenomena to be particularly important for themselves and others”. Małgorzata Kuleta also adds that “a personal system of generalized beliefs about life and the values associated with it, as well as the resulting ethical norms and patterns of behaviour, are sometimes treated as the most important determinant of the perceived impact and readiness to introduce changes” (Kuleta 2002, p. 25).

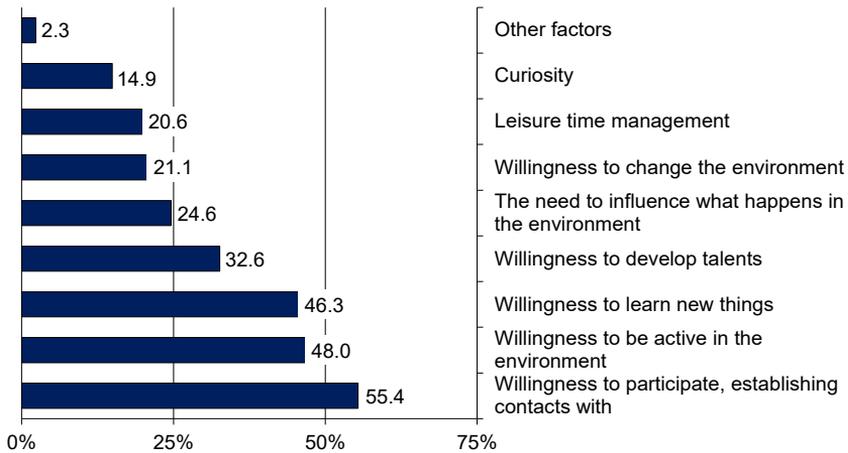
Important for the existence of activity vs. passivity is the stage of development of intentionality at which the individuals find themselves. Intentional activity is mature, meaning “developed, harmonized intentionality, which is realized as volitional action – experiencing the unity of one’s intentions, perceived meaning and undertaken activity”.

According to Albert Bandura’s theory, behaviour depends not only on the sense of agency but also on the prediction of the result. It means that the most conducive to undertaking activity is the recognition of a high probability of

achieving the desired results together with a strong belief in self-efficacy. Then it is easier to achieve the assumed goal, the implementation of which, however, cannot exceed the capacity of the individual (Keplinger 2008, p. 47).

### Motives and barriers to the activation of social forces as assessed by project participants

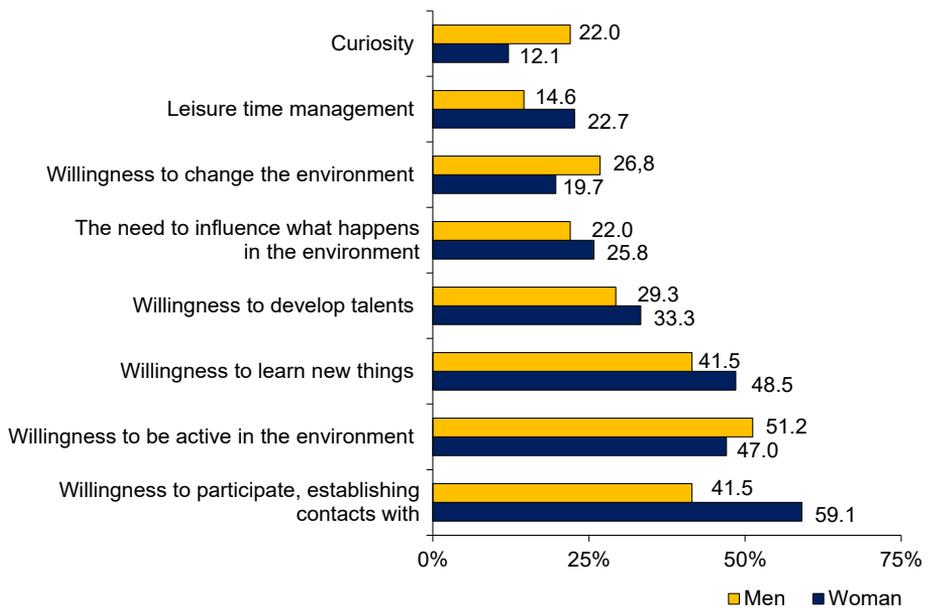
Motives are a very important factor in taking up the activity. People's needs determine the motives of their behaviour, and these, in turn, are factors that regulate activities, which are then associated with attitudes. A motive can therefore be defined, following Kazimierz Obuchowski, as "such formulation of means and purpose of an action that is consistent or in the slightest contradiction with all attitudes related to the situation to which the motive relates" (Obuchowski 1983, p. 153). The research assumed that the motives for participating in the project were quite significant for the effectiveness of project activities. The research shows that participants of socio-cultural projects implemented in Warmia and Mazury most often declared that they took part in it because they felt the desire to participate and establish contacts with others. More than half (55.4%) of the respondents declared that the willingness to be in a relationship with other members of the community motivated them to take part in the project. Also, almost half of the respondents (48%) declared the will to be active in their local environment as a motivation to participate in the project. The motive for the participation in project activities for approx. 46% of respondents was the willingness to learn something new (46.3%). Almost one-third of the participants indicated the will to develop their talents as motives for participating in the project (32.6%). Almost every fourth respondent indicated the need to influence what is happening in the environment (24.6%) as the motive for participating in the project, and nearly every fifth was motivated by the desire to introduce changes in their environment (21.1%). Also, the need to spend free time was important for the part of them (20.6%). The least frequent declarations were that participation in the project resulted from curiosity (14.9%) or other motives (2.3%), including non-material culture and passion (chart 1). It is also worth emphasizing that the main motives for taking up activity were the motives allowing to enter into relationships with other members of the local community and jointly create something new.



The data does not add up to 100% as the respondents could provide several answers

Chart 1. Motives for participation in the project (N = 175).

Source: conducted research.



The data does not add up to 100% as the respondents could provide several answers

Chart 2. Motives for participation in the project and gender (N = 173).

Source: conducted research.

The research proved that the women and men differed in their motives for deciding to take part in the project activities. Certain correlations can be observed when analysing the distribution of respondents' answers in terms of the gender variable. The main reason for women to become active in the project was the desire to participate in activities, as well as to make contacts with other participants (59.1%). This motive was indicated by 41.5% of men. Women (48.5%) were more often motivated by the desire to learn new things than men (41.5%). Women also chose to participate in the project more frequently than men based on a willingness to develop their talents, the need to influence what is happening in the community and the use of their free time. The motives to participate in the project among men more often included the desire to be active in the community (51.2% vs. 47% for women), as well as the desire to make changes in this environment (men – 26.8%; women – 19.7%). Also, curiosity more frequently motivated men to participate in the project (men – 22%; women – 12.1%) – chart 2.

A variable affecting the motives for participating in the project is the age of the respondents. In general, it can be assumed that for all respondents, regardless of age, the main motive for participating in the project was the desire to establish contacts with other members of the community.

This motive grew more important with the age of the respondents and was indicated by 56% of the youngest respondents, 51.6% of those aged between 31 and 50, and 54.3% of those aged between 51 and 60 and 58% of senior citizens. The ranking of motives among people aged 18–30 was the following: the desire to make contact with other members of the community came first, followed by the need to be active in the community and the willingness to learn new things, whereas the motives related to the development of one's own talents came third. In the age groups 31–50 and 51–60, the gradation of motives was similar, and thus the main motive for both age groups to take part in the project was the desire to make contact with other members of the community and the desire to participate in social life, the desire to learn new things came second in both groups and the willingness to develop one's own talents came third. In the group of seniors, just like in other groups, the main motive was the desire to establish contacts with others, followed by the need to learn new things, and in third place, people aged over 61 declared that their participation in the project was also related to the willingness to be active in the community. For senior citizens, an important conclusion of the research is the emphasis on the motivation of the oldest age group to use their free time, which was declared as the reason for taking part in the project by almost one-third of the respondents, i.e. 32%.

## Factors hindering the stimulation of social forces in local communities

Table 1. Factors making it difficult to stimulate social forces in local communities – participants (N = 175)

Barriers	Affect	Not affect
No interest in the project issues on the side of the community	70.0%	30.0%
Withdrawal from project tasks by project participants	58.6%	41.4%
Insufficient cooperation with other entities, e.g. school, church, other organizations	54.4%	45.6%
A limited number of people qualified to participate in the project	52.4%	47.6%
Difficulties related to the inability to freely reach the places where the project was implemented	48.0%	52.0%
Difficulties in building good relationships among participants	44.8%	55.2%
The tendency to appropriate the project by the group and to close itself off to other people	42.1%	57.9%
Reluctance to make changes in the environment	42.0%	58.0%
Reluctance to act unselfishly for the benefit of others	41.0%	59.0%
There is no adequate infrastructure	40.4%	59.6%
The reluctance of the community towards organizers from outside the local environment	39.0%	61.0%
Group conflicts among participants	36.3%	63.7%
Mutual dislike and prejudices among project participants	32.4%	67.6%
Conflicts in the group between the leaders and participants	32.0%	68.0%

Source: conducted research.

When analyzing the collected research material (table 1), it can be noticed that in the first place the respondents (70%) among the barriers against stimulating social forces in the environment pointed to the lack of interest of the community in the project issues. High ambivalence concerning project activities is related to the passivity of residents. The most adequate interpretation of the concept of passive given in the New Dictionary of the Polish Language is the explanation that “passive” means: not showing initiative, willing, indifferent, not involved, not taking part in something (Sobol 2002, p. 52). Very often, passivity is combined with conservatism,

striving for stability and balance, ensuring a sense of security, fear of risk, with habit and routine etc.

The analysis of the obtained research results shows that 41% of the participants indicated that the factor that hinders the stimulation of social forces in the environment is the withdrawal from the project tasks of the project participants in the course of its duration. Among the participants' opinions, these two factors limiting the effectiveness of project activities are located in internal barriers on the side of the community.

The next barriers indicated by the participants are located, in the assessment of the respondents, in terms of external factors. More than half of the respondents indicate a barrier to stimulating social forces in the environment as insufficient cooperation with other entities (e.g. schools, the Church or other organizations) – 54.4%

In the opinion of the respondents, an important barrier indicated by over 52% of respondents is the limited number of people qualified to participate in the project. In the opinion of the respondents, to stimulate social forces, project activities should involve more people from the local community. Among the external barriers mentioned by participants, there were difficulties related to the inability to freely reach the places where the project was carried out. The inhabitants of Warmia and Mazury much more often than the inhabitants of other regions of Poland struggle with problems with public transport and often with the communicational exclusion manifested by the shortage or lack of rail or bus connections.

Subsequently, the barriers selected by the participants of the project indicate a group of factors showing difficulties in building social bonds in the local environment. These barriers were indicated by 40% to nearly 45% of the respondents. The difficulties in building good relations between the project participants come to the fore here. This barrier was noticed by nearly 45% of participants. Another barrier indicated by about 42% of the respondents is the tendency to appropriate the project and close the group to other people. Moreover, the barrier is the reluctance to introduce changes in the environment. Although this barrier is positioned as the eighth, it has a fairly similar level of indications (42%). Another barrier is the reluctance to act unselfishly for the benefit of others, 39%. According to the research, Warmia and Mazury are still struggling with the problem of building social bonds and acting for the common good.

The last group of factors harming the effectiveness of socio-cultural activities in the local environment are barriers related to interpersonal relations. The

impact of these factors on the effectiveness of project activities was noticed by 32–39% of respondents. The reluctance of the community towards organizers from outside the local community was indicated by 39% of respondents. Research shows that the native population does not trust people from outside of their community, treating them like strangers. Nearly one-third of the respondents (36.3%) indicated that the factor that hinders the stimulation of social forces in the environment are group conflicts among project participants, as well as mutual aversion and prejudices (32.4%). In the opinion of one-third of respondents, stimulating social forces during the meetings was also not conducive to conflicts between animators and project participants. The last of the indicators limiting the effectiveness of project activities in the opinion of the respondents is the lack of adequate premises – 40.4%. This barrier is a consequence of the pro-capitalist policy that eliminated the places in the villages after 1989 that were at the disposal of socialist authorities under the previous political system, such as clubs, day-rooms etc. As a result, this base has been often sold out, which now makes it difficult to rebuild the infrastructure in which the local community could integrate.

A variable affecting the perception of barriers to the stimulation of social forces in the local environment is the gender of respondents. Analysing the results obtained, it can be concluded that men more often than women noted the influence of various factors hindering the stimulation of social forces in the environment. Men, more frequently than women, believe that pragmatic factors have a negative impact on the stimulation of social forces among project participants. These factors include the lack of appropriate facilities for the implementation of project activities, as this barrier was indicated by 54% of men and 37% of women, and the limited number of persons qualified to participate in the project – this barrier was mentioned by 60.5% of men and 50% of women. As many as 66.7% of men and 42.4% of women indicated the barrier related to the problem with reaching the place where the project was carried out. Women more often than men perceived barriers to the stimulation of social forces in factors of relational nature. These factors include the withdrawal of participants during the project, as indicated by 59.1% of women and 55% of men, and conflicts in the group between project participants, as indicated by 34% of women and 25% of men. The unwillingness to make changes in the environment was identified as a barrier to activation by 43.9% of the women and 37.5% of the men participating in the study.

A variable influencing the perception of factors hindering the stimulation of social forces in the local environment is the age of the respondents. In general, the youngest respondents (18–31 years old) perceive most barriers to stimulating social forces while the oldest respondents (61 years old and over) identify their lowest number. The youngest group of respondents is convinced that the stimulation of social forces in the local environment is hindered by participants' withdrawal from project tasks during the project (82.6% of responses). This belief gradually decreases with age and is held by 62.9% of respondents aged 31–50, half of those aged 51–60 and 48% of those in the oldest age group. Another important barrier to stimulating activity is the lack of interest in the project, which is perceived by more than 70% of those aged 18–60 and 62.5% of the 61+ group of seniors. The youngest respondents (63.6%) observe that a limited number of persons qualified to participate in the project is a factor hindering activation. This belief decreases with age and is shared by 57.4% of respondents aged between 31 and 50, half of those aged between 51 and 60 and 44% of seniors aged 61 and older. Nearly 70% of the youngest respondents see insufficient cooperation with other entities, e.g. schools, the Church or other organisations, as a barrier to stimulation. The same view is held by 63% of respondents aged 51–60 and half of those aged 31–51, as well as nearly half of seniors (47.9%). Young respondents very clearly indicate (60.9%) that one of the important barriers to stimulating activity is the difficulty in building good relationships between project participants. This barrier was mentioned by significantly fewer older respondents, i.e. 42.6% of the 31–50 age group, 45.5% of the 51–60 age group and only 38% of the senior group. More than half of the youngest respondents, more frequently than other age groups, indicated that barriers were caused by conflicts in the group between project participants and leaders (52.2%), as well as by the community reluctance to changes (52.2%) and difficulties in getting to the places where the project was carried out (52.2%). The group of respondents between 31 and 50 years of age more often than in the other groups indicated the barriers related to the unwillingness to act selflessly for the benefit of others (50%) and the aversion of the community to organisers coming from outside the local community (43.5%). The group of respondents between 51–60 years of age was more likely than the other groups to indicate the presence of factors hindering the stimulation of social forces in the lack of interest on the part of the community in the issues covered by the project (75.8%) and in difficulties in reaching the places where the project activities were conducted (55.9%).

## Conclusions

This article attempts to analyze both the motives accompanying the application for participation in project activities of a socio-cultural nature and the analysis of barriers to building social forces in the communities of inhabitants of villages and small towns in Warmia and Mazury.

An important conclusion from the research is that participants in project activities declare that they participate in projects because they feel the desire to take part in these activities and establish contacts with other people. Thus, the main determinant of participation in project activities is the need to build belonging and bonds with members of the community in which they live. Nearly half of the respondents also indicated motives related to the willingness to be active in their local environment, as well as the willingness to learn something new.

The analysis of the obtained research results also allows determining the barriers to stimulating social forces which, in the opinion of the participants, appeared during the implementation of social and cultural projects. According to the respondents, the main barriers in activating social forces limiting the effectiveness of socio-cultural activities in the local environment are internal, lying on the side of the community. Among the factors placed within internal barriers on the side of the community, the respondents indicated: lack of interest from the community in the issues of the project and withdrawal from project tasks by project participants. Other barriers indicated by the participants are located in external factors. Well, more than half of the participants see barriers in insufficient cooperation of the local community with other entities, such as schools, the Church and other organizations. A similar group of participants indicated that the limited number of people qualified to participate in the project was a barrier to stimulate social forces; difficulties related to the inability to reach the places where the project was implemented were also mentioned. The next barriers indicated by the participants focused on the group of factors showing difficulties in building social bonds in the local environment. These barriers were indicated by over 40% of respondents. The most important factor here is the difficulty of building good relations between participants in project activities. Other barriers indicated are the tendency to appropriate the project and close the project group to other people, as well as the reluctance to introduce changes in the environment and to act disinterestedly for the benefit of others, also the reluctance of the community towards organizers from outside the local environment. The last barrier is indicated by

nearly every fourth participant. Other barriers that make it difficult to stimulate social forces in local communities are, in nearly one-third of indications, the barriers related to conflicts in the group among participants, as well as to the reluctance and prejudices of project participants towards each other. One-third of participants indicate barriers that make it difficult to stimulate social forces in conflicts in the group between the leaders and participants of the project. Participants also point to a barrier related to the lack of adequate infrastructure.

The research shows that although the key motive to participate in socio-cultural projects is the willingness to participate and establish contacts with members of the community in which they live, several factors that make it difficult appear during these activities. Recognition of the occurrence of various types of barriers to the activation of social forces among the inhabitants of Warmia and Mazury and the resulting conclusions may contribute to their inclusion in subsequent social and animation activities.

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## SUMMARY

This article presents the factors that motivate participation in socio-cultural projects and analyses barriers to the stimulation and durability of social forces among participants of these projects, residents of Warmia and Mazury. The key category depicting discovery, activation and support processes are social forces in local communities.

**KEYWORDS:** activation, barriers to social activation, local environment, social and cultural projects, social forces

## STRESZCZENIE

W niniejszym artykule ukazano czynniki motywujące do udziału w projektach o charakterze społeczno-kulturalnym oraz przeanalizowano bariery utrudniające pobudzenie i trwałość sił społecznych wśród uczestników tych projektów, mieszkańców Warmii i Mazur. Kluczową kategorią obrazującą procesy odkrywające, uruchamiające czy wspierające są siły społeczne w społecznościach lokalnych.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** aktywizacja, bariery w aktywizacji społecznej, projekty społeczno-kulturalne, siły społeczne, środowisko lokalne

CEZARY KURKOWSKI – Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie

KATARZYNA BIAŁOBRZESKA – Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie

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