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# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A FEMALE CITIZEN IN POLAND? A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF THE CIVIL ACTIVITY OF WOMEN IN THE PROVINCE OF SILESIA

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## ABSTRACT

*The current article is a report on the quantitative research of civil activity of women in the Province of Silesia (N = 200). The research technique used here is CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview). The starting point of the proposal is the conceptualization of the term active citizenship and subsequently the identification of specific indicators that will be taken to represent the phenomenon explored (such as political participation, interest in government, law enforcement, altruism and volunteering, trust in people and institutions, and the use of the privileges of direct democracy). The article shows the importance of this project for development of civil society in Poland and the possibility of change that can be achieved in this way.*

## KEYWORDS

- Civil activity
- Women
- Political participation
- Democracy
- Voting

## Introduction

Civil activity may be considered the most rational and effective way of building a civil society. Therefore, development of various civil practices and of socio-cultural capital is a challenge that can be taken off by any citizen. Civic activity enables social change and especially may have a fortifying effect against socio-pathological phenomena in society (for example nepotism, corruption, mismanagement, police regimes, arbitrariness and other passive or anti-civil-liberties attitudes). The process of civil society building in Poland has not yet been completed so civil activity has a chance to bring a more durable and faster change. Theoretically speaking, the Polish civil activity should grow and strengthen after 1989. Practice, however, shows that the dynamics of the phenomenon of formation of civil society requires the implementation of practices of citizenship to the style of daily functioning.

In the first place, the fundamental aim of this article is a presentation of the civil activity of women in the Province of Silesia in Poland. Secondly, an explication of the degree to which typical civil practices, mainly concerning the public sphere, result in formation a civil structure and culture. A significant objective of the study is revealing

forms and dimensions of feminine citizenship which are considerably influenced by gender. Thus the major research problem was determined by means of basic question: what is the impact of gender for civil activity of women? This type of research has not been conducted in Poland and for this reason it is innovatory in nature. Moreover, the research will open an opportunity to introduce transformation in the mentality and action, it will allow for the building of civil society.

Civil activity is a very complex phenomenon, not only given its dynamics and structure, but mainly because of its forms and types. Thus there is no clear definition of the notion of active citizenship in the social sciences. Nevertheless, it is usually defined as all kinds of activities that focus on evoking social change associated with the creation and development of civil society. Active citizenship is based on a rational, legitimate, effective exercise of the rights and dispositions that result from the privilege of being a citizen, in order to multiply the socio-cultural capital and expand the civic network (Putnam: 1995, Putnam: 2008, Barber: 1984). It also means active participation of individuals or social groups in the public sphere and co-deciding on important matters relating to the public. Participation is understood in two ways. Firstly, it is taking part of different social subjects in the process of managing the public sphere. Secondly, it is understood as a practical manifestation of democracy and proof for the existence of civil society, where all citizens are free and equal in their rights and they all have the right to co-decide about the life of the political community to which they belong.

Active citizenship is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon which consists of different dimensions, types, and forms. As noted by Piotr Glinski and Hanna Palska (1997, p. 365) active citizenship as a conscious and joint action, which aims to articulation, implementation and defense of the interests (needs, aspirations) of one social group by the members of this group. These are activities that allow the formation of civic identity and meet the common features of civil actions as the control of power, the articulation of the interests of some social groups, civic protest or boycott. Active citizenship encompasses much more than a way of functioning in society ('the rules of the game') within the framework of existing models and structures. Active citizenship concerns the political competencies, social integration and inclusion, building up structures and justice agendas, relations of power to change these, where and when imperative (Lister 1997, p. 64). It also concerns civic sentiments, such as trust, honesty, loyalty, solidarity, aid, confidence, which are necessary in a civil society.

Many changes occurred after 1989, when there was a collapse of the communist system. Communism in Poland, as in other countries of the Eastern bloc, limited civic activity among all social strata or freed her aberrant forms (Sztompka 2000, p. 17-42). The problem concerned mainly women - who occupied low social positions and had a low social status. However, women were still fighting for their independence and subjectivity - organizing several large protests and strikes in opposition to the system, which are no longer beneficial to the communist state (Fidelis 2015, p. 22-46). The emancipation, though slow, took place. A clear tendency has been observed for many years now indicating a higher level of civil activity in Poland. According to the *Diagnoza Społeczna* (Social Diagnosis) the majority of the Polish work in society's favor, act collectively, form social nets, cooperate so as to do something useful for

the local community. In 2015 members of the organizations, associations, parties, committees, councils, religious groups, unions or wheels were 13.4% of respondents: 10.3% belonged to only one association; 2.2% were two, and 1.9% to more than two organizations. The percentage of members is slightly higher among men than among women (14,1%, 13,4% respectively). 67% of members declare that they participate actively in the activities of the organizations to which they belong. The most active members are in religious organizations (24.5%), followed by sports clubs (13.8%), circle of interests (e.g. fishing, philatelic, automotive, etc.) (13.6%), trade unions (12, 1%). Men mostly belong to sports clubs, political parties, interest groups and local authorities, while women belong to the parents' committees, social and religious organizations (Czapiński 2015, p. 315-340). The ongoing change in Polish society connected with the processes of globalization and modernization, and the greater cultural and economic challenges have resulted in a growing number of civil practices among women and men.

The text is based on empirical research carried out in the framework of the annual research project entitled "Active Citizen", which took place during the 2013-2015 period. The project was financed by a grant on scientific research specifically aimed at the development of young scientists (No. WNS-61-38/12). The main objective was to obtain quantitative data on the civil activity of women in the Province of Silesia and the classification of the ways in which this activity is manifested. Selected determinants of active citizenship, such as political participation, interest in government, law enforcement, altruism and volunteering, trust in people and institutions, and the use of the privileges of direct democracy were the subject matter of the analysis. In order to obtain reliable information in quantitative research on the extent and scale of the analyzed phenomenon, it is necessary to narrow the research context to the above mentioned determinants of citizenship.

### **Methodological basis of quantitative research**

In the present study the technique of CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) has been used. CATI is based on conducting telephone interviews with respondents with the assistance of a computer (Babbie 1992, p. 276). In the case of quantitative research CATI is the optimal technique because it gives the opportunity to question a larger portion of the population than 0.9. The advantage of this type of research is the possibility to obtain the necessary information in a quick and relatively cheap way: thus "telephone interviewing should be used as an alternative to personal interviewing under certain circumstances - especially when the interview schedule is relatively simple" (Nachmias 1992, p. 233).

The research was conducted on a group of women selected a result of random sampling. The sample consisted of 200 respondents randomly selected on the basis of telephone records coming from the national database. CATI was based on a standardized questionnaire, which was inspired by the Polish General Social Survey (ISSP Citizenship). The results of the research conducted in the Province of Silesia – a voivodeship in southern Poland, centering on the historic region Upper Silesia, with the capital in Katowice. It was created in 1999, out of the former Katowice, Bielsko-

Biała and Częstochowa Voivodeships. The research in the local community – while maintaining equivalence studies – seemed to indicate broad mechanisms of citizen participation of women in Polish society.

Socio-demographic characteristics of the study group are shown in the following table:

Socio-demographic characteristics	Items	Altogether
PLACE OF RESIDENCE	City	158
	Village	42
AGE	18-24	12
	25-34	50
	35-44	37
	45-59	70
	60-64	20
	65 and more	11
CIVIL STATUS	Single	25
	Married	138
	Divorced	24
	Widow	13
WORKPLACE	Unemployed	11
	Farm	3
	A state institution	136
	A private institution	50
THE AMOUNT OF INCOME PER FAMILY MEMBER (NET)	0-500 zł	7
	501-999 zł	46
	1000-1999 zł	118
	Above 2000 zł	29
ATTITUDE TO RELIGION	Believer	186
	believer not practicing	8
	Atheist	5
	other / own attitude towards religion	1

Source: own research

Cafeteria predicted several possible options of response. At the same time, thanks to the frequency scale “always / often / rarely / never”, the respondent could accurately determine the frequency of their civic activity. The information obtained helped to determine which activities are important to the respondents, which are obvious and necessary (the ones undertaken always and often), and which are considered unnecessary, exhausting, confusing, perhaps even harmful by the respondents (and

therefore never undertaken by them).

### **Participating in election: female citizens go voting**

Participation in general election is one of the primary determinants of citizenship - international research shows that having the right to vote and systematic referenda activity are perceived by social awareness as the core of citizenship (Dolata et al.: 2004, Raciborski: 2011). As indicated by Putnam, participation in elections is the most common form of civic activity, it is the practical implementation of the democratic principle of equality – to vote means to belong to a political community and to decide about its future on an equal footing with others. This thesis seems to be even more justified by the fact that the citizens who are regular voters are usually involved in a number of additional civil initiatives and projects: they work as volunteers, pay the money to charity, serve as jurors, participate in meetings of the school council, take part in demonstrations, are interested in politics, cooperate with others to solve the problems of the local community (Putnam 2008, p. 58). Besides, electoral participation indicates the direction of modernization of the society – “it can serve as an indicator of broader social change” (Putnam 2008, p. 60). This is because by voting, an individual influences the shape of social reality, which makes him / her a creator of changes at micro, mezzo- and macrostructural level.

Participation in an election is a determinant of democracy and political pluralism. By having the right to vote an individual can have a real impact on the legislative process by participating in public debates, formulating public opinion, and manifesting his or her views. A citizen-voter sets more or less effectively the direction of policy at both regional and national level – as he/she is in fact a member of the larger civil community, whose social influence is not and, in accordance with political correctness, cannot be neglected.

Although taking part in election is not the only and most important form of civic activity<sup>11</sup>, a vast majority of the respondents were convinced of the important role of electoral participation in shaping the attitude and behavior of citizens. The possibility to vote was perceived by the respondents as the primary determinant of citizenship, which has its constitutional justification - The Constitution of the Republic of Poland assumes that the right to vote is given only to fully-fledged citizens of the state, and therefore the act of granting citizenship to an individual is equivalent to the legal guarantee of the right to participate in the elections. While at the declarative level political participation is a manifestation of citizenship, practice of everyday life shows that the Poles relatively rarely take advantage of the privileges of direct democracy. Voter turnout at both local and state government level is low, it sometimes does not even exceed or meet the electoral threshold. When you compare Poland with other countries of Western Europe, for example France or Great Britain, the difference is even more striking, as there, more than three-quarters of eligible voters usually go to

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1 As Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady claim: “the perception of civil engagement only from the point of view of participation in elections is incomplete and misleading [...]. As compared with those active in various other political activities, voters show a specific combination of needs they satisfy and different interest in problems, which are the motives of their activity [...]. Voting is the action of a sui generis”. Quote after R. D. Putnam 2008: 61.

the polls<sup>2</sup>. In terms of referenda activity the picture of the study group is consistent with the national electoral situation<sup>3</sup>: more than half of the respondents – 55.50% always take part in elections, 26.50% declare frequent participation in referendums, 15.50% occasionally use their voting rights, and 2.50% of the respondents have never participated in elections. The degree of electoral absenteeism is high, although it seems optimistic that it does not exceed 20 percent. A percentage of 55.5 declare permanent participation in the elections, which seems to be too enthusiastic a diagnosis - the overestimated number of the so-called permanent voters has two reasons. Firstly, in the Polish society there is a tendency among some respondents to confirm their participation in elections, despite the fact that the declaration does not reflect their actual participation. This mechanism stems from the need to create the image of a good and responsible citizen who appreciates the constitutional democracies privileges and uses the rights of citizens to political and social freedom and equality. This defense mechanism is for giving a boost to high self-esteem - it is known as self-serving attribution. Secondly, the result of the survey is burdened with significant statistical error, which in the case of random sampling is particularly common, mainly due to the large quantitative deviation of the sample group from the actual image of the population. Considering a percentage of Poles who voted in 2015, this statistical error is not so large. In fact, the presidential election was attended by 48.96% (1st round) and next 55.34% (2nd round), while in the parliamentary elections - 50.92%.

### **Interest in national and regional politics: female citizens are interested in political life**

Another indicator of civil activity is a constant interest in politics at regional, national, international level. Sixty percent of the respondents declared interest in the governmental issues (21% confirmed constant; and 39% frequent interest), while 40% take almost no or no interest at all in governmental issues. The alarmingly high number of people alienated from political life seems to have its historical reasons. Poland, like other post-communist countries, is a country with poorly developed civil traditions - which is reflected primarily in the weakness of citizenship (clientelism, populism etc.), poor interpersonal relationships, low social capital, loss of values promoting citizenship (such as solidarity, the ability to cooperate, dialogue skills, activities for the common good) (Theiss 2007, p. 35-51). This results in political apathy, a sense of social helplessness, reluctance to engage in the public sphere, remaining on the margins of the society while presenting discontent and demanding attitude at the same time. According to Victor Osiatyński, this attitude is the aftermath of communism - a system which denied individualism, while encouraging wrongly understood collectivism. The effects of collectivization in almost every aspect of life were as follows: dispersed responsibility, life helplessness, lack of self-determination, inability to decide about one's own destiny, a sense of dependence on the government (Osiatyński 2004, p. 22-26).

2 <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr> or <http://www.europarl.europa.eu>

3 Average turnout in Poland during the parliamentary elections is 47% and is the lowest in the European Union. A slightly higher turnout is reported in presidential elections - 58.2%. (See: [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)).



The remains of the communist system may be one of the reasons for the poor political participation and civil alienation. Inappropriate political socialization or complete lack of it can be another factor explaining the situation, especially justified from a gender perspective. Despite the fact that there were a number of limitations for civil activity women need to underline their active participation in the social movements and trade unions. Shana Penn stresses the crucial yet little-known role women played in the rise of an independent Polish press and in the fall of that country's communist government (Penn 2014, p. 33-54). Similarly, Maria Fidelis states, on the basis of interviews with the women who belonged to the Polish pro-democracy movement and trade unions, that their big contribution was obscured by the men's success in the public sphere. Fidelis reveals the story of how these women fought for the right to participate in the democratic process, but also for promoting women's rights - employment rights and conditions, right to participation and ownership of an active voice in the public sphere, reclaiming abortion rights (Fidelis 2015, p. 57-78) in opposition to the Catholic Church (Fuszara 2005, p. 3-11). The same women then went on to play influential positions in post-communist Poland and formed the political scene.

The Upper Silesia is a region with centuries-old patriarchal and androcentric traditions, it is characterized by a hierarchical system of gender: men are seen as the dominant sex, women as the subordinate one (e.g. Górnikowska-Zwolak: 2004, Kossakowska-Jarosz: 2009). The traditional division of roles was strongly radicalized and it was in force much longer than in other regions of Poland, not to mention Europe. This division resulted from the image of women engaged in family and household duties, which was fixed in the regional culture. The above mentioned patterns of gender due to the process of internalization have become a permanent part of gender identity. The belief that women belong to the private sphere, which was sanctified by tradition, history, and social adaptation to the roles of women associated with reproduction and domestic production (unpaid work in the household), reduces or completely denies the access of women to the institutional spheres connected with politics, government, and power. According to this mechanism, the implementation of a political culture occurs at the expense of women. Unfamiliarity with political culture or indifference to the political system turns into reluctance to civic participation and other activities contributing to broadening the public sphere and strengthening democracy. The attitude of civic passivity tends to persist - women are not interested in political life, which results in lack of involvement, poor knowledge of political science (subjects relating to ways of functioning political parties, organizations or state institutions), lack of knowledge about basic constitutional principles and poor orientation in current affairs occurring at home and abroad.

The attitude of civic passivity is probably also a consequence of the post-communist shock therapy measures and the dismantling of the social state. After the collapse of communism in 1989 the situation of women was very difficult. The reforms caused the rise of the unemployment and poverty. In the consequence of the dismantling of the social state women lacked their regular income, a lot of benefits and other forms of government assistance. The economic consequences went beyond just less consumption – prolonged unemployment has led to a disappearance of skills, education or otherwise useful talents.

## Life in the rule of law: female citizens want to live according to the rule of law

One of the basic characteristics of civil society is the recognition of the idea of the rule of law, where the rule of law prevails, and the Constitution is the most important act regulating the life of the society (Graczyk 1997, p.13-28). The concept of the rule of law implies that the citizens and institutions of a democratic state comply with the legislation, and thus the rights and civil liberties are preserved. The essence of the law is to protect citizens from unlimited interference of the state in their lives, especially in personal and intimate spheres, from violating personal benefit or the boundaries of conscience. There are institutions such as independent courts or the Ombudsman especially set up to guard whether the civil rights are respected.

Research shows that the idea of the rule of law is very important and useful: the vast majority of respondents (92.50%) always obeys the law, what is more - none of the women interviewed admitted to constant violations or disregard of the law or to committing any of the so-called white-collar crimes which include: financial fraud, money laundering, tax evasion, embezzlement, or illegal trafficking. Obviously, this does not mean that illegal activities do not occur at all. The high number of responses confirming the obedience of the law does not necessarily reflect the actual respect for the institutions of the democratic state and the conviction of the necessity of law in social life and constitutional validity in the assessment of certain examples of behavior and attitudes. The fact that respondents gave more than 90% of support for the idea of the rule of law may be the result of political conformism or ritualism, which derived from adaptation of an individual to a group<sup>[4]</sup>. As indicated by Robert K Merton, ritualists comply with socially recognized standards (in this case the standards set by national and international legal regulations), but do not see the values behind them. Ritualists thoughtlessly comply with the law, without being aware of its social significance, or obey the law only for fear of sanctions for acts of bending or disregarding the legal code (Merton 1965, p. 149-153).

Failure to abide and implement the law at the level of microstructure causes serious global consequences, i.e.: economic stagnation, growing corruption, strengthening class divisions, the weakness of public institutions (courts of justice, police, state and local government). Personal benefits achieved regardless of the cost incurred by others and relativity of selfish behavior become a priority.

Civil society needs mature and conscious citizens who know and respect the law. "A high quality citizen"<sup>[5]</sup> actively participates in civic community, protects the interests of a group, is interested in the problems of the local community he or she is a member of (by the place of work or residence). This is justified by centuries-old tradition of the rule of law, in which the constitution is the most important document which regulates the functioning of the state and its relations with the citizens. To

4 Piotr Sztompka appealed to the concept of Robert K. Merton analysing attitudes of Poles towards political transition (Sztompka 2000).

5 Jacek Raciborski states that there are less than 20% of „high quality citizens” in Poland. High quality citizens are “people who are interested in politics, who know the basic constitutional solutions, who are sufficiently informed about what is happening in Europe and in the world, and who regularly participate in the elections.” (See: „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 08.10.2011)



be a citizen means to recognize and respect the constitution, which simply allows one to use the rights and privileges of citizenship and obliges him/her to fulfil the obligations towards the society as a whole. The Polish Constitution, approved in 1997, gives an important place to citizenship. The exercise of human rights is the base of this document. At present the task facing the government is to show that real democracy remains the most important social determinant. The right to liberty, equality, social justice today must be perceived both as a duty and a challenge.

### **Altruism, philanthropy, and volunteerism: female citizens work for others and for the common good**

Altruism, philanthropy, volunteering, spontaneous helping, are constantly identified as the main components of social capital (Putnam 2008, p. 196-212; de Tocqueville 1996, p. 132; Chimiak 2006, p. 190-216). When combined with honesty and trust they are the values (in terms of the classical approach – “civil virtues”), which determine the formation of relationships and social networks built on a sense of community, solidarity, and security. Philanthropic and altruistic behavior is closely linked to the anthropological principle of reciprocity - *do ut des* (I give to you, you give to me), based on an informal sense of commitment to the interaction partners who are giving us a gift (which has material or immaterial value). This mechanism is based on psychological rituals of exchange practiced in primitive communities characterized by a low level of organization. The gift obtained obliges to reciprocate in the same or a different form. In the case of philanthropy and volunteering, most of the “return gifts” (the type of symbolic or material support) take the form of a substitute - in exchange for the donated money, time, food, clothing - donors gain awareness of well-fulfilled obligation, which strengthens their own axiological system and build their self-esteem. It also happens (even quite often) that philanthropic deeds bring tangible benefits to the donors. Whatever the motivation which encourages the voluntary behavior, every sign of help given integrates the individuals and strengthens their civic engagement.

My research, presented here, shows that such activities as helping people, providing support, donating time and money, doing social work are common, as well as women working mainly in female-dominated sectors, such as health, welfare, education. The majority of respondents (92%) declare that they help and support the weak and disadvantaged. The assistance is provided in both a formal way in accordance with the legal regulations for public benefit (e.g. on the basis of the Law on the activities of the institutions of public benefit and volunteerism) and in an informal way, which manifests itself in the daily work for others, such as e.g.: baking cakes for school festivals, looking after the neighbors’ children, organizing events, toy auctions, collecting clothes or school supplies. The breakdown of these activities usually indicates gender stereotypes. The above mentioned informal actions counterbalance the institutionalized actions which are subject to bureaucratic requirements and sanctions. In the course of qualitative research, it turned out that the motives of altruistic behavior are mainly connected with religion and belonging to a church or other institutions functioning in a church (Caritas, St. George’s House). In these cases, the inspiration for such activities is the internal need which is synonymous with the sense of duty or moral imperative.

Secondly, the aid activities are connected with volunteering or voluntary membership in Non-Governmental Organizations focused on helping the needy. New forms of financial support practiced by the respondents, such as: contributing to local provident funds, the creation of local civic budgets, fund-raising or other strategies of innovative sponsorship are also worth mentioning.

Altruism, philanthropy, volunteerism, self-help in many contexts of everyday life function as one of the main forms of civic participation. Life in a civil society requires from citizens independent and voluntary work for other members of the community. Individual and altruistic actions are the engine of other major social changes and in some cases – they are the only way to transform the reality. The altruistic actions are a necessity especially when the state is weak and the basic condition and responsibilities of a government function improperly - to put it simply it is so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over social work and the public services.

### **Social trust: female citizens should trust others**

The main components of civil activities are: solidarity, reciprocity, being helpful, and above all social trust. To trust someone (i.e. to assume that he/she will act loyally and honestly) determines the type of social relations people make (Sztompka 2007, p. 36). Systems deprived of confidence, even at the elementary level, are so fragile and unstable that they have no chance to survive and bring any benefit. Lack of confidence leads to an increased level of social control and multiplying additional sanctions, the implementation of which requires time, energy or financial resources. From the point of view of social cooperation, it brings loss to the interaction partners because it increases the expenditures which are referred to in economics as transaction costs. The costs are associated with “monitoring, concluding contracts, legal proceedings and enforcement of formal agreements” (Fukuyama 1997, p. 171).

Trust, metaphorically called “the foundation of a society,” is the basis for normal relationships, primarily because when trusting one another people can cooperate more frequently and more fruitfully, and thus their actions are effective, simple and quick. As Putnam adds, “society based on generalized reciprocity is more efficient than communities characterized by mistrust - for the same reasons why money is more efficient than barter. Honesty and trust alleviate friction, which cannot be avoided in social life.” (Putnam 2008, p. 228). Trust fosters establishing strong relationships and social networks; it is the glue that incorporates an individual and the group. Communities that base their activities on trust within the agreed terms of the contract gain tangible benefits from it (Fukuyama 1997, p. 56). When analyzing the level of trust, it is necessary to take into account its two forms: firstly, thick trust - built in personal relationships, which are based on strong, frequent and lasting ties, secondly, thin trust - general trust in other people resulting from belonging to a community and anticipating reciprocity (Putnam 2008, p. 230).

Research shows that the level of social trust is (in the study group and in the whole Polish society) at a low level. Poles are much less likely than citizens of other countries to believe (in) other people. According to the European Social Survey, only 13% (less only in Bulgaria and in Portugal) trust others (Czapiński 2015, p. 333-335).

In the Province of Silesia the level of trust is low due to the geopolitical situation (ethnic conflicts, internal divisions, colonization of land by incoming people, large differences in the political - a division of the supporters of the far right and far left). Thus only 21.5% of the study's population claims that they definitely trust people around them; compared with 10.5% who never trust anybody. Weakened public confidence seems to have at least two reasons. The first is described by Stefan Nowak as "sociological vacuum", which is a symptom of distrust in all people, due to the loss of social bonds which form the civic capital (Nowak 2009, p. 140-143). The second reason is a general social belief that one should be cautious with the unknown "generalized other", which results from the conviction that there are fewer and fewer honest people, so in interpersonal relations one should be reserved and suspicious. The research confirms a visible tendency to trust people in one's nearest environment: - we trust our spouse, children, parents, friends; while being much less likely to trust the people in the so-called secondary groups: colleagues, friends and representatives of church or state authorities (67% of respondents believe that politicians cannot be trusted). Representatives of other communities and cultures belong to the group we trust the least and the most rarely.

If the culture of trust flourishes in Poland it will give impetus to the process of creation of civil society. Citizens, when trusting each other, become more credible and have a good reputation. The more trust in the community, the higher the civil activity: "people who trust other fellow citizens, are more likely to undertake work as volunteers, contribute more to charity, more often join in the policy and operation of local organizations, are more inclined to undertake the duties of a juror, donate blood more frequently as honorary donors, keep their tax obligations more conscientiously, are more tolerant of minority views, and exhibit many other civil virtues [...] those who believe that other people are honest, rarely lie, cheat, and steal themselves, and they better respect the rights of others. In this way, fairness, civil engagement and social trust mutually reinforce" (Putnam 2008, p. 231). Trust can be seen as a base of social life, often reflecting the bonds and networks – which could also be interpreted as the precondition of citizenship.

### **Democratic privileges: female citizens are active**

There are various socio-political activities which are the evidence of how active the citizens are, for example: signing petitions; participation in demonstrations, strikes, manifestations; participation in the National Assembly; subsidizing social actions, participating in charity fund-raising; establishing contacts with the authorities or the media to solve social issues; participation in online forums or panel discussions devoted to social issues. All of these can be regarded as an indicator of the quality of civil society and democracy.

In Poland the change of the political system after 1989 changed the general trend of taking action in the public sphere, which derives from the advantages of direct democracy. This change was marked by three features of the new social order: free market, democratic constitution, and pluralism of ideas and institutions. The development of democratic structures fostered the improvement of attitudes, values

and aspirations of citizens. Through innovative and creative possibilities of the direct impact on the public sphere the competences and skills of citizens changed. The fact is that Poland has developed an underground civil society during the 80s communist regime – which resulted in the formation of trade unions, social movements, strikes, demonstrations, protests. However, the short democratic tradition is the main reason yet for undeveloped civic culture and a number of defects in the structure of citizenship. However, it must be emphasized that the development of civil society in Poland, as in other post-communist countries of Europe, will take longer due to weak civic traditions. This does not obviously mean that the process of crystallization of a civil society is very distant in time or impossible to implement, but the creation of the foundations of citizenship is directly proportional to the activity of all citizens.

There are different strategies and possibilities of democratization. The research shows that the most popular civic action is signing petitions. Collecting signatures for social initiatives is an important component of modern citizenship, but at the same time it is an activity which poorly involves the citizens – it is the least time-consuming and does not require a relatively great amount of energy and effort. As a consequence, signing of a proposal or initiative petitions is not always equivalent to the actual need to settle the case or interest - sometimes it can be a replacement operation or a defense mechanism (the signers explain themselves that they did something to settle the matter and that they did not remain indifferent) (see i.e. Strelau 2007, p. 615-617) any times this is done in a mechanical way, sometimes unconsciously, as a result of the pressure exerted by charismatic individuals or the environmental lobbying. In some cases, signing petitions or letters to the authorities is a way of organizing civil life – it gives the impression of self-decision, sanctions subjective opinions or assures people that the views held by them are shared by other people. Signing appeals often becomes a substitute for the direct and active citizenship, which require active participation, monitoring, supervision and personal conduct. Delegating civic responsibility to the petitioners or bodies that deal with appeals submitted, provides an excuse that one has engaged and done something.

The least frequently practiced type of civic activity (6.5% of responses) was contact with the media, including the appearance in the media to present one's own or group views, and consequently initiate a public debate on the subject. Similarly, most respondents (62%) declared that they would never take such an activity. This state of affairs can be justified by stereotyped perception of the media overrating their rank or ascribing them too strong impact on the collective consciousness. The lack of involvement in the media is rooted not so much in the absence of mass media as in the uncertainty and concerns generated by the institution of television, radio, newspapers (it seems that in the case of the Internet, this interpretation is not justified because of the anonymity and the general availability of the medium). These concerns arise first of all from the sense of remoteness of media from everyday affairs and the fact that the media focus mostly on the themes of popular culture and entertainment; secondly, the need to overcome the shyness and stress resulting from a possible opportunity to speak on a television program, on the radio, or in the press. The declared distance towards the media is not good news from the point of view of the dynamics of the development of civil society. It should be emphasized that without media relations,

sponsorship or media attention, most social initiatives will be impossible to implement as the media are the main tool of political and symbolic struggle. The greater the media support some initiatives, the better conducted the marketing strategy, the expected result of which is a further increase in support. The media are an excellent forum for social mobilization, they are such a significant force to promote and propagate the idea that their effect becomes dominant and unrivalled.

Active citizenship is connected with the general attitude of the citizens towards democracy and the institutions of a democratic state. Opinions on democracy and its mechanisms influence the actions of individuals in the spheres of public life, and thus determine the direction of development of civil society. Democratic order requires above all the implementation of procedural rules (such as sovereignty of the people, division of power, representation, and political pluralism etc.), the use of which enables the achievement of the objectives considered important and necessary for collective life and the fulfilment of basic axiological values, (freedom, equality, dignity, tolerance, and justice). The respondents considered primarily high wages and high standard of living to be the key criteria of democracy. Subsequently, they enumerated: the equality of citizens before the law (65%), freedom of thought and expression (55%), choice of government in free elections (54.5%). The right to equality and freedom is considered a non-negotiable condition for democratic governance as perceived in a traditional and classic way, whereas the most-highly noted response (concerning the quality of life) seems to characterize modern democracies. At the same time, as diagnosed by Inglehart, it confirms the return of modern societies to postmaterialistic values. Inglehart argues that the emergence of postmaterialism is a part of the great process of cultural change, which relates to gender roles, religion, sexual mores and cultural norms of Western society. This change involves a redefinition of the hierarchy of needs, which results in a shift from the traditional values (such as: material security and financial stability) to the non-traditional, or post-materialistic ones (such as: self-expression, the sense of belonging, freedom of speech, quality of life). Of course, this does not mean that traditional values (which refer to those beliefs, moral codes and morals that are passed down from generation to generation) are no longer relevant or are denied. However, citizens begin to demand more and they want rising general standards. In the situation when basic needs and civil liberties are satisfied (assuming that the democratic system is mature, stable and durable), individuals strive to achieve the so-called higher needs, the implementation of which improves the quality of individual and collective existence, creates identity, releases energy to creative or expressive activities (Inglehart 2005, p. 334).

When correlating the evaluation of democracy with the subjective assessment of the sense of civil activism, the following picture of the studied population emerges: women who consider themselves to be active citizens claim that democratic order depends primarily on the equality of citizens before the law, freedom of opinion and expression, high wages and standards of living. The least important criteria of democracy are the rights of cultural minorities (sexual, religious, and national). This conclusion is particularly striking when it comes to the development of LGBT organizations in Poland and the granting of full rights to sexual minorities. Poles do not accept homosexuals – Poles weakly tolerate gay marriage and oppose the adoption of



children by same-sex couples. The tolerance level is low – only 7% of the population strongly agree with the opinion that homosexuals should have the right to live their lives as they want. We can say that there is a strong taboo about homosexuality in Polish culture.

## Conclusion

This article provides a general picture of civic participation of women in the Province of Silesia. It shows the extent of change in active citizenship and trends in ways of citizenship. All the analyzed determinants of citizenship (political participation, interest in government, law enforcement, altruism and volunteering, trust in people and institutions, and the use of the privileges of direct democracy) remain at a low or average level, which may indicate the fact that the formation of civil community is burdened with many difficulties and requires a long-term perspective.

There is no single answer to the question of what are the causes of poor engagement of women in common and rational action, the aim of which is to build a civil society. It is primarily because Poland is a country with a complex history and geopolitics, where the process of civil society building is *in statu nascendi*. On the one hand, we have the reluctance to engage in such civil activities which in countries of Western Europe and Scandinavia are considered natural and are still widely practiced. Moreover, the respondents, even those thinking forward, declare a negative attitude towards the fact that they could possibly engage more and do it more effectively (e.g. by making contact with representatives of political power and the media). The degree of social trust also leaves much doubt, especially in the case of trust in people outside the family or the immediate environment. Although confidence in the closest social circles remains at a relatively high level, it results from natural bonds and it is difficult to see it as a great asset. On the other hand, contrary to the beliefs of selfish human nature, the respondents evidently show a high rate of altruism and voluntary activities for the needy, which is important in building solidarity and self-help, i.e. the pillars of civil society.

Active citizenship is the only way to build a modern society and mature democracy in Poland. Only when citizens are willing and able to transform the status quo, it will be possible to talk about the development of the state. Its application allows the activation of citizens through the use of the political means and capabilities to support of the active participation that focuses on the management of gender (such as social protection programs, gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting). Moreover, this article assists to better understand, and effectively integrate the community and ability to achieve civil objectives. Presentation of the actual state of citizenship should be an excuse for civil activation adjusted to the standards and capabilities both of the region and of the country. For women who are aware and have the possibility of active citizenship, it is easier to further support their political empowerment by connecting them to objectives of national and international politics. Moreover, it is possible to support feminist networks in order to increase their ability to earn, decide and access capital, power and authority.



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