

**ONLINE CITIZEN MEDIA  
OF WARMIA AND MAZURY**



# **ONLINE CITIZEN MEDIA OF WARMIA AND MAZURY**

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## Foreword

The multi-author monograph *Online Citizen Media of Warmia and Mazury* constitutes the yield of the work undertaken as part of an interdisciplinary project of the Monitoring Centre for Online Citizen Journalism, carried out in 2022-2024 at the Institute of Journalism and Social Communication, UWM in Olsztyn. The priority objective of the project, which conceptually combined social sciences and humanities, was to compile a Catalogue of Citizen Media of Warmia and Mazury (now available at <https://cmidzo.uwm.edu.pl/>), as well as explore this media sector, documenting its activities and identifying the needs of the milieu. Our project aspires to address an evident gap in scholarly reflection on the societal and culture-building role of civic media in the contemporary world. We wish to observe this phenomenon, provide patronage and support grassroots media projects. We hope that the Monitoring Centre for Online Citizen Journalism in Warmia and Mazury will be a platform integrating creators of such media in Warmia and Mazury.

The monograph we now present to the Reader is a record of the team's early research diagnoses concerning the online citizen media of Warmia and Mazury. As the research progresses and analytical material is accrued within the Catalogue of Citizen Media of Warmia and Mazury, further publications will supplement and add to this volume. The source material examined here was collected between June 2021 and March 2023; it spans 43 civic media outlets which qualified for the first version of the analysis presented in this study (the selection criteria are discussed in Chapter 1).

This volume is the result of a joint effort. The seven-person team of authors is composed of experienced researchers affiliated with the Institute of Journalism and Social Communication, UWM in Olsztyn, who nevertheless represent various specialties and pursue different research interests. Specifically, these are dr hab. prof. UWM Urszula Doliwa, head of the project by the Monitoring Centre for Online Citizen Journalism of Warmia and Mazury, as well as dr hab. prof. UWM Joanna Szydłowska, dr hab. Maria Rólkowska, dr Marta Cichy, dr Dominika Myślak, dr Martyna Siudak, dr Magdalena Szydłowska, and dr Marta Więckiewicz-Archacka. It should be noted, however, that the publication would not have been possible without the contribution of persons

who were involved in the project during its various stages and engaged in diverse research activities. The latter associates include dr Magdalena Żmijkowska, dr Szymon Żyliński and mgr inż. Adam Błaszczok.

The monograph comprises seven chapters. The opening text by Urszula Doliwa offers important insights into the essence of the project. It outlines the theoretical underpinning of inquiry into online citizen media, explains terminological nuances, presents the methodological premises of the research and describes how it proceeded. The second chapter by Marta Więckiewicz-Archacka portrays the diversity of channels by means of which members of local communities share content, as well as characterizes the media in terms of their multiple forms. Subsequently, Maria Rólkowska provides an overview of the impressive range of themes and issues covered by the studied civic media and draws attention to the variability and multi-layered nature of the narratives. Joanna Szydłowska reflects on the modes of textualizing regional content and the cultural assets of the Warmia and Mazury region noted by the users. In turn, Dominika Myślak and Martyna Siudak introduce the creators of online citizen media, characterizing the milieu with respect to gender, education and age. The diversity of motives and inspirations for engaging in the civic media space are discussed in the chapter by Urszula Doliwa and Magdalena Szydłowska. The volume ends with a chapter devoted to journalistic deontology by Marta Cichy and the pragmatic and practical aspects of the code of specific values, standards and principles which function in the domain of online citizen media in the region.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all participants in the study, our interviewees – the creators of the online citizen media in Warmia and Mazury, who were kind enough to give us their time and share their invaluable experience. We hope that this book will prove useful to you and all those who want to follow in your footsteps.

The presented research report in English is part of a larger whole, which consists of a more elaborate version of the book in Polish. At the end of the Polish part of the monograph one can find a brief description of each of the presented citizen media.

*Urszula Doliwa, Maria Rólkowska, Joanna Szydłowska*  
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# Chapter 1

## Citizen Media in the Theoretical and Methodological Perspective

*Urszula Doliwa*

University of Warmia and Mazury

### The Role of Citizen Media in Democracy

The development of the third media sector – often referred to as the civic sector – to complement the public and commercial media sector, was considerably influenced by increasing commercialization processes (Michalczyk, 2010) and growing disillusionment with what the public media had to offer. Although civic media existed well before the internet, the opportunities to disseminate one's own content grew exponentially thanks to the latter, boosting the phenomenon known as citizen journalism, based on which civic media could emerge.

Citizen media play an important role in democracy. Consequently, theories concerning the role of the media in democratic systems provide an important reference point for investigations into the role and importance of civic media. The concepts of democracy as a system based on active citizenship seem particularly relevant in this context. As Benjamin Barber argues, a strong democracy requires good, active citizens (Barber, 2003, p. XVII). Moreover, the author contends that our freedom and equality last as long as our citizenship.

Traditionally, citizen media have been seen as an alternative to the mainstream media, promoting participation and dialogue. Stefania Milan underlines that grassroots media created by citizens make a very important contribution to development processes and play an important role in democratization (Milan, 2009, p. 598). They are driven by the desire for self-development among their creators and the development

of the community they serve rather than by market logic (Howley, 2005, 2010; Rennie, 2006). Their governance structure is also much more democratic, while the audience has a greater influence on the content provided. Citizen media are close to the people, address everyday issues and delve into topics that the mainstream media are unwilling to tackle. Terms such as *social benefit*, *social objectives* and *social gain* are indeed often employed in the legal definitions of citizen media.

Even so, creating such media requires support. At this point, it may be worthwhile to recall the findings of the international Media Pluralism Monitor study, conducted under the auspices of the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF) and the European University Institute (EUI). From the standpoint of citizen media, one of the notable elements of the study is the social inclusiveness index, as part of which one analyzed such aspects of media operation as the position of citizen media and access to media by marginalized groups: minorities, local and regional communities, women and persons with disabilities. Above all, citizen media is an important element of media pluralism, as it enables various social interests, demands, and needs to be publicized (Joint Declaration on Media Freedom and Democracy, 2023).

## **Internet as a Space Promoting the Development of Citizen Media**

The development of the internet brought about a change in traditional models of journalism. Jobs in traditional media are disappearing, and revenue is decreasing as advertising moves online. Today, the profession of a journalist has degraded while finding employment in the media has become problematic, which should be recognized as a negative phenomenon. However, digital migration has also inspired individuals and entire communities to create content communicated through independent, largely volunteer-based journalistic projects that carry a substantial societal value.

There are numerous examples showing how the internet can serve as an alternative platform to traditional media discourse, enabling public debate. Susan Forde notes that the internet has empowered audiences

and removed the barrier between sender and receiver (Forde, 2011, p. 46). Blogs have been recognized as a form of expression which creates an alternative public sphere: a space where citizens can discuss affairs within a framework that differs considerably from the one provided by mainstream media, television and government (Etling, Roberts & Faris, 2014). This also applies to YouTube channels (Antony & Thomas, 2010, pp. 1280-1296). The growing popularity of audio content, including podcasts and internet radio, promotes the emergence of grassroots media projects in that format as well (Doliwa, 2022; Berry, 2016; Black, 2001; Frary, 2017). While the first period of development of online citizen media primarily involved blogs and websites, the majority of current projects – as the current study demonstrates – rely on social media (Wasilewski, 2022, pp. 48, 49). In authoritarian countries (Etling, Roberts & Faris, 2014), social media has served as an effective means of communication for alternative political content (as evinced, e.g. by social media during the Arab Spring) (Ingram & Bar-Tura, 2014). Regarding the role of the internet in the development of citizen media, one should also draw on the category of hyperlocal media, which, covering very limited geographical territory, is addressed to specific communities and areas ignored by the mainstream media, create original content and operate primarily online (Metzgar, Kurpius & Rowley, 2011, pp. 772-781; Harte *et al.*, 2019).

The crisis in local media (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019) was one of the factors that caused a new media model to emerge, where low creation costs were combined with the online dissemination of content. Many such outlets are established online due to low entry barriers, including relatively low outlays and the absence of a requirement to obtain a special licence for such an activity. Thus, they fill the gap resulting from the closure of local printed periodicals or their commercialization, as a result of which issues important to the public were marginalized (Wasilewski, 2022, p. 42). They are also created in places where local communities had no previous media representation whatsoever, thus contributing to the emancipation of such communities and strengthening local identity. In fact, the internet is often the place where local identity takes its shape. Citing the findings by Łucja Kapralska, Krzysztof Wasilewski observes that while earlier the idea of the small homeland was promoted mainly through the printed newspapers, monographs or occasional lectures, it is the internet,

which nowadays has become the leading platform of regionalist activity (Wasilewski, 2022, p. 33; Kapralska, 2017, pp. 123-135).

## **Defining Citizen Media: A Vague Definitional Framework**

Defining the citizen media sector is not a simple task. For years, practitioners and researchers have argued on the elements which should be recognized as crucial when defining that sector and which may be dismissed.

The citizen media sector is so diverse that it not only eludes clear-cut definitions but also tends to be variously designated. Alternative media (Atton, 2002; Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Lewis, 1993), community media (Doliwa, 2016; Lewis, 2015; Berrigan, 1979; Howley, 2005), rhizomatic media (Carpentier, 2016), grassroots media (Downing, 2007), radical media (Downing, 2001), third media sector (Coyer & Hintz, 2022), third sector media (Łosiewicz, 2018), non-commercial media (Dorer, 1997) are only a few examples from an extensive list of terms applicable to non-public media which simultaneously can hardly be considered commercial. Although each of the above appellations emphasizes a slightly different aspect of such media, their common denominator is that they operate in a slightly different fashion from the commercial and public media.

A rigid definitional framework for citizen media, based on which a medium could be excluded or included in that category, is tremendously difficult to devise. The vagueness and randomness of such media initiatives – owing to their rhizomatic structure – actually constitute their immanent defining characteristics (Bailey, Cammaert & Carpentier, 2012, p. 35).

When designing the current study, the authors were aware of the diversity of genres and forms of civic media and the various theoretical approaches, which is why they set out to create a definitional framework that is inclusive rather than exclusive. Thus, the online citizen media of Warmia and Mazury included only those online media projects which: – are not created by commercial enterprises and governmental institutions;

- their main objectives are other than profit;
- are created by people originating from/residing in Warmia and Mazury or whose life's interests are centered in this region;
- are not offensive, derisive or hurtful towards other persons or resort to hate speech.

**Are not created by commercial enterprises and governmental institutions** – projects launched by companies or those which represented a natural extension of business activity were disqualified. Those run by state or local government institutions were excluded as well.

**Their main objectives are other than profit** – media activities from which the creators derive their livelihood were not taken into consideration. This also applied to media projects that were a natural extension of the enterprise of a given creator. It needs to be stressed that one should not equate the non-commercial nature of such undertakings and the utter lack of fundraising opportunities as part of one's activities. As Patrick Vittet-Philippe and Philip Crookes observe, there is no evidence that the mere presence of advertising/sponsor material affects the quality of such content (Vittet-Philippe & Crookes, 1986, p. 158).

**Are created by people originating from/residing in Warmia and Mazury or whose life's interests are centered in this region** – the broad approach adopted results from the changing trends in how the region is conceived. As Jacek Poniedziałek underlines, while “region was initially a geographical concept”, its contemporary definition should also allow for the cultural, economic and ethnic features: everything that shapes regional awareness (Poniedziałek, 2011, pp. 29, 33).

**Are not offensive, derisive or hurtful towards other persons or resort to hate speech** – since one of the aims of the project is to promote civic media, it has been assumed that media projects that insult, deride, or use hate speech – thus causing harm to others – would be excluded from the study. Naturally, there is no shortage of such outlets online. When identifying such phenomena, particular attention was paid to *ad personam* arguments, negative labelling of the persons one spoke of, and the presence of hate speech.

## The Citizen Media in Warmia and Mazury

The Warmia and Mazury region is a unique area with a diverse socio-political, demographic, and cultural history (Traba, 2007). The present-day realities of this region are a result of the experiences that followed the end of World War II (Sakson, 2011). Negotiating and translating various cultural patterns, social values, languages, and denominations is a daily practice there. The current generation faces new challenges in interpreting the narratives of nostalgia and injustice of different ethnic groups, the ethnocentric and nationalistic mythologization of the “Recovered Territories,” the instrumentalization of regional thinking, and attitudes towards the German civilizational heritage (Łukowski, 2002; Poniedziałek, 2011). The new inhabitants of the region also had to face challenges such as degradation of the natural environment, poverty and exclusion in the areas of the former State Agricultural Farms, and the fact that the entire region is considered a part of the poorly developed “Poland B”.

The report entitled *A Survey of the Civic Sector in Warmia and Mazury* demonstrates that the education levels in Warmia and Mazury do not reflect an increase in civic attitudes and competences. According to its authors, the communities of Warmia and Mazury still require investment in human capital. A certain opportunity for the development of citizen media in the region may be seen in the fact that – as it follows from research on civic participation in Elbląg – the residents showed by far the greatest interest in the affairs of the town/city in which they live (70% declared substantial and 19% very substantial interest in the affairs of their town/city) (ESWIP, 2016). There are multiple indications to suggest that independent online media initiatives have indeed a very important role to fulfil in the region.

Citizen media initiatives in Warmia and Mazury may thus support the processes through which the regional identity is crystallized and contribute to the transformation of the region itself in that they address issues often overlooked by the mainstream media. Krzysztof Wasilewski stresses:

A certain phenomenon that stands out in comparison with other regions – equated with the current voivodeships – are the profiles, websites and blogs devoted to Warmia and Mazury. Apart from those created by the official voivodeship authorities, there is a sizeable group of amateur social media projects focusing on the history, culture and nature of the region. They often draw on pre-war history, i.e. history dominated by the German experience, manifesting, e.g. in the names of towns and districts that they employ (as in the case of the rest of the Western and Northern Territories), but most often, they adopt the perspective of the present-day Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury. This category may be argued to include those initiatives which restore subjectivity to the Masurian minority, recalling its language and culture. Given other regionalist projects, those dedicated to Warmia and Mazury stand out in terms of ever-increasing professionalism and regularity of publication. Meanwhile, the lack of similar initiatives concerning other regions is quite conspicuous. Lower Silesia is perhaps the only exception, whose past is explored by several websites (Wasilewski, 2022, p. 67).

## Research Methodology

The aim of this research was to characterize various citizen media initiatives in Warmia and Mazury which operate online. One of the chief premises was that the analysis would encompass a minimum of 40 such projects. Ultimately, 43 interviews were qualified for the study, following a multi-mode qualification process.

The list of online citizen media worth contacting was compiled based on the results of a search conducted with the support of the Bibliography of Warmia and Mazury. Specifically, the research team carried out a systematic analysis of the publications indexed in the Bibliography of Warmia and Mazury, which collects information on publications about the region since 1945, grouped by keywords. The Bibliography of Warmia and Mazury is a valuable database of bibliographic information on relevant publications, and it is continually updated by a tremendously committed team. It provides bibliographic addresses – supplemented with a brief, one-sentence description of the content – of books, journals/periodicals, articles and press mentions relating to the Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury and texts written by authors from the region. The analysis targeted bibliographic descriptions collected under tags such as blog, media, social media, Facebook, YouTube,

portal, radio, and television in the period from 2017 to 2022 (until 10<sup>th</sup> July 2022). In effect, several projects were identified and subsequently included in the research corpus (“Vlog Wykładowcy”, “Olsztyn Okiem Drona”, “Profesorskie Gadanie”, “Nowości Książkowe”, “Halo książki”, “Blog Anny Tyszki”, “Moja Warmia, Moje Mazury”, “Szalone walizki”, “RobiMy Podróże”, “Czarne Szkło”). However, to date, it has not been possible to contact several authors identified during that search. Moreover, many of the online projects mentioned in the local media were no longer active when the research was being carried out.

Furthermore, the online citizen media of Warmia and Mazury were also selected based on the following:

- previous research into citizen media conducted by the team members;
- contacts that members of the research team established during their work in local media;
- online search conducted by project participants;
- information on media initiatives provided by the catalogued representatives of civic media, who cited similar undertakings;
- personal submissions via a form available on the project’s website or direct contact with the project team. The initiative was publicized in local outlets, social media and the websites of the University of Warmia and Mazury, “Wiadomości Uniwersyteckie” monthly, Radio UWM FM – a licensed, Olsztyn-based radio station – as well as by civic media creators themselves, mainly through their social media.

The authors’ collection spans a considerable variety of initiatives, which seemingly have nothing in common. The following are just a few examples of the significant differences between the media studied:

- the vast majority are created individually, but there are also team projects;
- most are created by amateurs, but a number are run by experienced journalists who no longer work for the traditional media;
- a local focus is an important point of reference for some of the creators, while it appears to have little relevance for others;
- the audience of the content one creates is generally limited, but certain initiatives can boast a fair degree of popularity;



- these undertakings are not launched with profit in mind, yet it does not mean that some do not manage to raise funds to support their activities from advertisers or sponsors;
- representatives of such media are involved in one or more citizen media projects;
- the diversity of areas of interest is perhaps the most impressive element, as sometimes they are niche topics, such as Olsztyn trams or the so-called “serious” games, whereas elsewhere, the thematic range is quite broad, as in the case of “Głosy Warmii i Mazur”. Lifestyle topics – those one could call “trivial”, such as fashion – intertwine with more serious issues relating to the cultural and historical heritage of the region.

It is, therefore, a highly eclectic set for some, perhaps even excessively so. The common denominator, however, is the tremendous enthusiasm of the citizen media creators who, for reasons other than financial gain, try to convey something important to their audiences. Hence, it may be worthwhile to take a closer look at their activities.

The research relied primarily on pre-structured, in-depth interviews. The main research questions which guided the researchers as they conducted the interviews were as follows:

1. What is the history of online citizen media in Warmia and Mazury?
2. What are the chief ideological premises of such projects, the motivations of their creators and the goals of their activity?
3. How do such projects function in technical, organizational and financial terms?
4. Who are the creators, what principles are they guided by, and how do they form relationships with their collaborators and audiences?
5. What problems do the creators of online civic media in Warmia and Mazury have to confront?

Representatives of the selected citizen media were invited to a radio studio at the UWM Faculty of Humanities. In addition, one interview was conducted in Elbląg at the headquarters of the Association for Supporting Non-Governmental Initiatives. The interviews, conducted between June 2022 and March 2023, were all recorded and lasted between half an hour and two hours. Subsequently, a total of 43 interviews were studied and transcribed, resulting in 723 pages of standardized typescript. In some of the chapters, the authors took advantage of additional data, e.g.

originating from websites, social media profiles and statistical reports. In such cases, pertinent methodologies are outlined in the chapters in question.



Figure 1.1. Dr Dominika Myślak during an interview with Julia Gadomska (“Pani Etykieta”)

Source: archive of Monitoring Centre for Online Citizen Journalism in Warmia and Mazury.

The citizen media studied here were categorized according to the leading theme and modality of communication. Using simple variables, the researchers also determined the localness saturation index for each of the projects in question<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> One point was awarded if the title featured the name of the region or a locality, and one point if this was indicated in the project’s description. However, the scored relied primarily on the relevance of localness for a given citizen medium, as assessed by its creator, who could rate it on a scale of 1 to 5.

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## Chapter 2

# Typology of Content Sharing Channels

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### Introduction

Citizen journalism had already been in place before the internet came into existence, but the latter has become an “accelerator of such initiatives”, as Ursula Doliwa observed (2012, p. 83). It would be a mistake to equate grassroots media with online communication exclusively, but there is no doubt that the network has dominated this form of activity, just as in many other fields of social or cultural engagement. Local activists have tapped into the possibilities of the internet since its inception, as evidenced, e.g. by the extent to which the Bulletin Board System was used in the 1990s (Paprzycki & Mitchell, 1996, p. 173). Serving as electronic noticeboards, BBSs were used – among other things – to exchange information between members of local communities. Significantly enough, the global network – intended to connect the remotest corners of the world – was almost immediately adapted to the needs of local and even hyper-local communities. This general pattern applies to all the successive forms of online communication: newsgroups, online forums, blogs or social networks.

Grassroots media creators follow the direction in which the network evolves, seeking increasingly effective tools for sharing content. Today, social media platforms and apps predominate in online communication. Krzysztof Wasilewski, whose research is concerned with regionalism 2.0, claims as follows (2022, p. 5): “Digital regionalists, as they may be called, have already become a permanent feature in the landscape of social platform users”, which means that the multiple topics addressed by



internet users in social media also include those concerning their respective regions, towns, villages, or even specific streets or schools.

In this monograph, the issue of contemporary regionalism combines with the internet as a space where grassroots media function, which is why various planes of inquiry intersect here. One should also note that the interest of researchers and other authors in regionalism is growing. According to Krzysztof Wasilewski (2022, p. 15), one may speak of “a kind of renaissance of interest in this issue in Poland and beyond, resulting partly from the awakening of group identities and partly from the attempts to find a solution to the problems of contemporary democracy in the empowerment of localness”. Wasilewski stresses that the considerable fascination with the globalization of culture began to decline at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a simultaneous shift of emphasis towards localness (Wasilewski, 2021, p. 113). Although regionalism tends to be discussed by researchers from the standpoint of cultural studies or sociology (Kowalczyk, 2016; Kwilecki, 1992), the phenomenon which Krzysztof Wasilewski terms as Regionalism 2.0 may be studied in the interdisciplinary paradigm, whereby combining the viewpoints of researchers from distinct scientific disciplines appears to be an effective solution. Wasilewski refers to two stages in the development of hyperlocal media online, which were determined by the emergence of subsequent communication tools. The first stage was linked to the functionalities offered by websites and blogs, while the second was determined by the rise of social media. Wasilewski also attaches particular importance to the role of social networking sites, which, in his opinion, align well with the nature of hyperlocal media (Wasilewski, 2022, pp. 48, 49).

Issues relating to grassroots media are extensively discussed by Urszula Doliwa, who advances a classification of grassroots journalism (Doliwa, 2012) as well as delves into detail, e.g. community radio, demonstrating its distinctiveness from the public and commercial sectors (Doliwa, 2016). In classifying citizen journalism, Doliwa lists four types: 1) citizen journalism, based on the activities of non-virtual communities; 2) citizen journalism based on online civic media created by virtual communities; 3) citizen journalism based on platforms provided by the commercial media; 4) citizen journalism operating on public platforms (Doliwa, 2012, pp. 84-96). The aforementioned distinct nature



of grassroots media, as well as their difference from public or commercial equivalents, is a highly relevant element in this monograph, given that the underlying premise of the Catalogue of Online Citizen Media of Warmia and Mazury was to include those media undertakings which do not constitute the primary source of income for their creators, a feature underlined by Urszula Doliwa (see more in Chapter 1).

## Methodology and Results of the Study

Forty-three structured, in-depth interviews served to determine which content-sharing channels are used by the creators whose activities have been entered in the Catalogue of Online Citizen Media of Warmia and Mazury. The first questions that the respondents were asked concerned the history of their online activities: “Since when has your medium been active (date, circumstances)?”, “What inspired you to take action?” and “Please indicate the most important turning points in the history of your project”. The phrasing of the above questions was intended to help direct the attention of creators to one type of their activity. This was important because a number of the respondents are simultaneously involved in several projects that often revolve around similar themes (being different nonetheless) or launch further online initiatives derived from previously closed websites or blogs. Focusing the interview on one particular medium was sometimes difficult as the respondents have engaged in multiple activities. Even so, this was necessary for the interview to be as accurate as possible. One of the subsequent questions concerned the platforms used by the creators. Consequently, it became possible to identify the primary medium and determine which channels serve as additional means of communication; for instance, the respondents specified that their primary medium is a blog, but they use channels on Instagram and Facebook to promote their blogging activity. Hence, this study adopted a distinction between the primary medium and supplementary channels for sharing content linked to the primary medium.

In the case of interviews with persons involved in several concurrent projects, the researchers created separate catalogue entries (e.g. Robert Hejduk’s “Jadenarowerze.pl” and “Warmia Bike”). Prior to analysis,

the data obtained from the respondents was verified, since often when asked about the platforms used, they would indicate their personal social media profiles, which were otherwise unrelated to their grassroots media activities. Occasionally, respondents also mistakenly classified websites or social media channels as blogs.

The essential goal of this study is to determine which content-sharing channels are utilized by the creators whose undertakings have been entered in the Catalogue of Online Citizen Media of Warmia and Mazury. Related to that primary objective, specific objectives include the following: 1) establishing which content-sharing channels are cited by the respondents as the primary medium; 2) specifying how many creators rely solely on the primary medium and how many use complementary communication channels linked to the primary medium. Such research objectives may be pursued using quantitative analysis, while their accomplishment is important in that it enables one to determine which content-sharing tools – in the opinion of online creators – are best suited to the needs of specific grassroots activities. The study thus shows the respective proportions of creators who focus on blogging, explore the still relatively novel communication space of TikTok, consistently develop a local website, or take advantage of cross-media opportunities by maintaining channels on multiple social networks.

The presentation of the results should begin with information concerning those content-sharing channels that play the main role in the respondents' activities, i.e., were indicated as the primary medium. It should be noted that all blogs were characterized collectively (in the "blog" category) without listing the specific blogging platforms used by the creators. The same approach was adopted with podcast sharing services, which were categorized as such ("podcast sharing service"), without distinguishing the services in question. This was necessary due to the variety of podcast platforms used by the respondents (Spotify, Apple Podcast, Spreaker).

A quantitative analysis of the tools used by the civic media creators from Warmia and Mazury shows that blogs are the most frequently stated as the primary medium. Respondents are almost equally likely to use Facebook as their primary medium. Most online creators maintain a fan page on that platform, but 4 out of 12 projects are operated as

Table 2.1. Content sharing channels indicated by creators from the Catalogue of Online Citizen Media of Warmia and Mazury

Primary medium	Number of indications
Blog	15
Facebook	12
YouTube	6
Instagram	3
Website	3
Podcast sharing service	2
Newsletter	1
TikTok	1

Source: own elaboration.

Facebook groups. The newsletter form is an interesting outlier in the Catalogue of Online Citizen Media of Warmia and Mazury. When visiting a particular website, internet users can submit their e-mail address to receive information about local events once a week (“Olsztyn. W Skrócie”).

The survey also determined the number of projects whose creators focus exclusively on the primary medium and the extent to which they use complementary channels to share content.

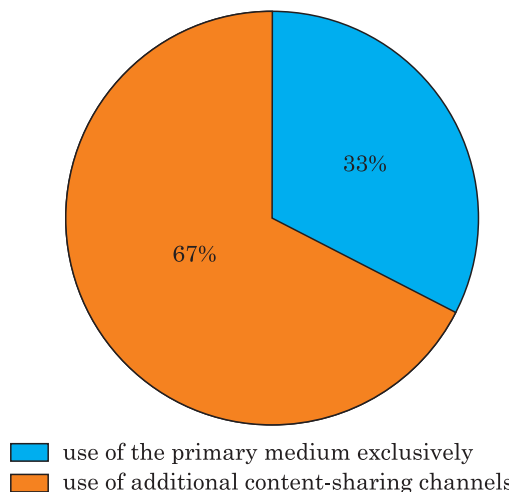


Figure 2.1. Primary medium and additional content-sharing channels in the activities of creators from the Catalogue of Online Citizen Media of Warmia and Mazury

Source: own research.

Most creators in the Catalogue of Online Citizen Media of Warmia and Mazury do not confine themselves to the primary medium. However, an activity limited to one medium should not be perceived as a shortcoming since focusing on a single content-sharing channel remains the only option available to many respondents, who stated in interviews that a lack of time is the main difficulty when engaging in civic activity online.

As noted above, as many as 67% of the respondents use at least one additional content-sharing channel. During the interview, the respondents were free to indicate any sharing channels, and they often supplemented the information later, sending further links after the interview. The research shows that there is considerable diversity among the respondents who indicated that they use complementary content-sharing channels. Specifically, 11 creators use 1 additional content-sharing channel, 7 use 2 such channels, but for certain respondents, the number reached as many as 6 or 7 additional channels to share content (authors of the blog “Szalone Walizki” were record-holders in that respect). The substantial number of supplementary content-sharing channels indicates that the authors aspire to be as professional as possible in their online activities.

Quantitative analysis also showed that blogs and Facebook predominate among the primary media, whereas Facebook and Instagram serve as the leading additional content-sharing channels, followed by YouTube and podcast-sharing services.

Table 2.2. Additional content-sharing channels used by creators in the Catalogue of Online Citizen Media of Warmia and Mazury

Additional content-sharing channels	Number of indications
Facebook	25
Instagram	16
YouTube	9
Podcast sharing service	5
Website	4
Tik Tok	3
Twitter	2
Other	2

Source: own research.

Blogs do not feature in the above list. While they play an important role as the primary medium, they are not used as additional content-sharing channels. This should be attributed to the nature of blogs, which serve chiefly to deliver the content developed by the author. Conversely, social media profiles – whether on Facebook or the image-centric Instagram – are convenient tools for promoting such content.

## Conclusions

The above research confirms Facebook's popularity but offers surprising findings on the viability of blogs. The high result of the most popular social platform is not surprising, at the same time corroborating the observation that it is a readily accessible tool, intuitive to use, enabling one to reach a large audience, publish diverse forms of content, as well as provide information about events, create groups and so on. However, the extensive use of blogs may be somewhat unexpected. After all, this online communication tool has seen its popularity decline significantly in recent years. In fact, the decreasing interest in such online journals has caused subsequent blog platforms to close down. Many civic media creators opt for a blog as the primary online communication channel for several reasons, among which creative freedom seems particularly important. Engaging with social media means submitting to the underlying algorithms of the respective platforms, whereas bloggers enjoy greater authorial liberty. Moreover, blogs may also involve longer posts which would otherwise qualify as TLTR (too long to read) for social media users.

Facebook and Instagram are prevalent among the complementary channels for sharing content linked to the primary medium. Using those communication tools, creators can promote and publicize their undertakings effectively. At the same time, it is worth noting that different content-sharing channels enable one to tap into the potential of cross-media or transmedia; this approach consists of publishing content through different communication channels to complement each other. Henry Jenkins (2007) refers to this phenomenon as transmedia storytelling.

Despite the difficulties in collecting and classifying source material, one must not underestimate the role of cataloguing the output of grass-roots media creators, which is often ephemeral. Today, we no longer have access to numerous blogs and websites that closed down several years ago. In another few years, a proportion of the media analyzed in this monograph will likely not exist either. Therefore, it may be worthwhile to consider an action going further than mere cataloguing, i.e. archiving of resources, which is advocated as well as implemented by many researchers in Poland and internationally (Konopa, 2020; Wilkowski, 2021; Brügger & Schroeder, 2017; Gomes, 2022).

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## Chapter 3

### Thematic Range

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As Urszula Doliwa notes, citizen media is not a precisely delineated phenomenon, as its nature is indefinite and rhizomatic (see more in Chapter 1). When discussing it, one cannot fail to consider such important factors as the creators or the subject matter since the reach of such media is determined primarily by content (Wasilewski, 2022, p. 54). In turn, the content – meaning the themes – eludes straightforward classifications (Wasilewski, 2022, p. 54) because it is just as vague as the media which deliver it, not infrequently transitioning seamlessly from one topic to another.

All 43 citizen media of Warmia and Mazury included in the catalogue before March 2023 may be divided into six thematic groups, which will be discussed in order of size. At the same time, it should be remembered that the thematic division of the analyzed media – not unlike their definition and nature – is quite fuzzy and fluid. In the case of most media, their main thematic range does not preclude the presence of other content, which is why they have been assigned to the identified groups in line with their dominant theme.

### Themes in the Media

#### Lifestyle

The largest number of media – as many as 13 – are dedicated to lifestyle topics, the most popular of which is travelling: visiting various places using different means of transport. Travels across Poland, Europe, as well as

around the world are covered in two blogs run by two married couples, namely “Szalone Walizki” (2016) by Dorota and Jaroslaw Kowalski and “RobiMy Podróże...” (2012) by Małgorzata and Kamil Kowalewicz. The Kowalskis declare that they show the world from the perspective of the four elements: water, earth, air and... the palate, while their blog was named a Rising Star of the Blogosphere in the 2017-2020 Most Influential Bloggers ranking by Jason Hunt (“Szalone Walizki”, 2016). It includes the following thematic tabs: the world, exploring Poland, cuisine, diving, film and photo, guides, and podcasts. On the other hand, the blog by the Kowalewicz couple is largely concerned with the needs of travelers with disabilities. The thematic tabs on their page are as follows: travel stories, travel guides, tips, countries, hotels for persons with disabilities, companies, podcasts, collaboration, and contact.

Travel, this time on a bicycle and around Warmia and Mazury, is covered by two other media included in the catalogue. One of those is Jakub Hajduk’s blog “Jadenarowerze.pl” (2019), in addition to presenting the cycling routes in Warmia and Mazury, also offers advice for two-wheeler enthusiasts. In the interview, the author also drew attention to interesting facts about the region, technical innovations for cyclists and the “Hall of Fame” tab, where he introduces successful sports persons, as well as “Moja Warmia”, which he considers the “core” of the blog (“Jadenarowerze.pl”). The “Warmia Bike” podcast is another medium of the kind, having been launched in late 2022 by the aforementioned Jakub Hajduk and Przemysław Lenart. It promotes “cycling as a form of activity and a way of life along the paths and routes of Warmia” (“Warmia Bike”, 2022). Yet another medium inspired by the passion for cycling and travelling is the website “Periodista Marta”, run by journalist Marta Wiśniewska. The author introduces herself as someone who loves cycling, covers several thousand kilometers each year, enjoys travelling to Italy and Spain, learning languages, listening to music and reading books (“Periodista Marta”, 2022). The author’s pursuits are reflected in the themes addressed on the website.

The interests and lifestyle of young women also feature in other media created by female authors of Olsztyn. In the blog entitled “Lejdi Gada czyli Kobiety przy Mikrofonie”, launched in 2018, Karolina Rogóż-Namiołko has concerned herself with exceptional women, as well as



art, culture and music. She introduces the reader to interesting figures – women soldiers, pilots or a pastor – claiming that “Each of us is different and unique [...] We’re all interesting” (“Lejdi Gada czyli Kobiety przy Mikrofonie”, 2018). This is reflected in the titles of the entries: “Charisma is a woman”, or “Can girlhood be cool?” Fashion, on the other hand, is the subject of Anna Tyszka’s blog “I Am Only Ania”, active since 2012, which the author describes as follows: “[...] you will find posts related to fashion, music, photography, autograph collecting, though not exclusively. I’m inspired by everything that surrounds me” (“I Am Only Ania”, 2012).

This thematic group also includes two media concerned with Olsztyn and focusing on specific themes and audiences. The capital of Warmia and Mazury as a place for families with young children is discussed in the blog “OlsztyniAnka”, which offers “information about activities and attractions for children as well as family-friendly locations available in Olsztyn” (“OlsztyniAnka”, 2019). Meanwhile, Marcin Wójcik, a journalism graduate from UWM in Olsztyn, has been exploring the culinary aspects of the city since 2021. In his blog “Kulinary Olsztyn”, the author states: “From the very beginning, I wanted KO to become a place where you can find information about novelties and changes relating to food establishments” (“Kulinary Olsztyn”, 2019). The blog features reviews of Olsztyn’s culinary venues – including lakeside restaurants and pet-friendly places – as well as culinary reports, gastronomic reviews, and event announcements.

Students of UWM in Olsztyn also engage in lifestyle-oriented media activity. Julia Gadomska, who is majoring in Polish Studies, runs a channel on TikTok entitled “Pani Etykieta”. Regarding its themes, the author says: “This is primarily about good manners, but I have also started a series called *Aesthetics of Living*” (“Pani Etykieta”). Weronika Dankiewicz, a veterinary student, created a personal blog – an Instagram studygram “Wjakwetrynaria”, which not only shows what studying that major looks like but also discusses studying as an experience and a challenge for young people (“Wjakwetrynaria”). In addition, five Journalism and Social Communication students: Jakub Kolberg, Aleksander Chmarycz, Maciej Sępioł, Tomasz Zakrzewski and Bartosz Niecikowski, publish a lifestyle and sports podcast “Klamka zapadła” on YouTube. Their chief topic of interest is football, but many videos are

also concerned with volleyball and mixed martial arts. Another YouTube podcast classified in the lifestyle group is created by very young persons, i.e. secondary school students. The material for “Małomiasteczkowi” (2022) is produced at a school in Węgorzewo by three of its young residents: Lena Melnyczok, Marcjanna Rymaszewicz, and Natalia Stępnia. The creators describe their thematic range as “a series of conversations concerning the life of young people in a small town like Węgorzewo” (“Małomiasteczkowi”, 2022).

## Culture

General culture is the subject of 12 catalogued citizen media. Three blogs in this group are dedicated to literature, as their authors publish book reviews. The earliest-established (since 2009, under the current name since 2015) is the literary-critical “Nowości Książkowe – Blog Bernadetty Darskiej”, where the writer and professor at UWM in Olsztyn shares her book reviews. Regarding the selection of publications she comments on, the author notes: “There is virtually no poetry on my blog [...]. It is mainly Polish prose, foreign prose and non-fiction [...] Indeed, sometimes it is also scientific literature [...]” (“Nowości Książkowe – Blog Bernadetty Darskiej”). Olsztyn-based writer Tomasz Białkowski – and privately the husband of B. Darska – runs “Blog Atorski Tomasza Białkowskiego”, which thematic is described by the author as follows: “I post reviews of books I’ve read, films I’ve seen, or plays I’ve seen [...] I mention literary awards [...]” (“Blog Autorski Tomasza Białkowskiego”). The third literary blog, active on Facebook since 2012, was created by Hanna Łozowska, a Journalism and Social Communication graduate at UWM in Olsztyn. “Halo Książki” features non-fiction, belles lettres, poetry and graphic novels, including books by Warmia and Mazury regional authors.

Another group of culture-oriented media concentrate on photography, with Olsztyn being the most frequent theme. The largest number of members – over 18,000 – are gathered in the Facebook group “Pstryk z Olsztyna” (2019), run by Marcin Kierul and Marta Kruk, which showcases pictures of various locations across the city and “brings together photographers and amateurs who want to share images that capture the beauty of Olsztyn” (“Pstryk z Olsztyna”, 2019). “Olsztyn po Mojemu”

(2019) is a website created by Grzegorz Komorowski to publish his photographs of the city on the Łyna River, which are often – though not always – accompanied by text. The capital of Warmia and Mazury is also depicted in minimalist photography shared through the Facebook group “Minimal Olsztyn” (2016), founded by Tomasz Rusak. The images posted their “formally sparing but eloquent images of our bountiful urban and non-urban reality” (“Minimal Olsztyn”, 2016). Arkadiusz Stankiewicz’s “Drony Warmińskie” (2012) on Instagram features pictures of the entire region of Warmia and Mazury captured from a drone. On the other hand, the Instagram profile “Czarne Szkło” (2020) is not thematically related to either Olsztyn or the region, celebrating black-and-white photography instead. Run by Paweł Ziółkowski, it features portraits, nudes and outdoor sessions.

Music is the area of interest for only one medium, i.e. the YouTube channel “Rapnau” (2015), which was started by Tomasz Loewnau, a graduate of Journalism and Social Communication at UWM in Olsztyn. The creator characterizes the content thus: “[...] a place where we react live to the most interesting rap, rap-adjacent and sometimes completely non-rap premieres!” (“Rapnau”, 2015).

Information on cultural events in Olsztyn and the Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury is provided by the open Facebook group “Archipelagi Kultury Warmii i Mazur” (2015), maintained by a group composed of Urszula Kosińska, Ewa Mazgal, Łukasz Staniszewski, Rafał Aleksander Mikułowski, Ewa Bartnikowska, Zofia Wojciechowska, Stanisław Czachorowski, Marcelina Chodyniecka-Kuberska, Magdalena Hania and Artur Szczepański. This thematic group also encompasses two media that promote the culture of Warmia and Mazury and offer insights into the history of the region. One of these is “Przepisy ze Śpiewnika”, a blog which Agata Grzegorzczyk-Wosiek – writer, blogger and cultural animator – started in 2020. The author shares recipes and culinary stories about the cultural heritage of Warmia, Mazury, and the Eastern Borderlands. Piotr Szatkowski’s regional Facebook page, “Mazurskie Słówko na Dziś” (2013), presents the history and culture of the ethnic Masurians and their language. According to the author, it enables visitors to learn “the secrets of the speech, history and culture of Mazury” (“Mazurskie Słówko na Dziś”, 2013).

## History

Another group of media distinguished in this study is dedicated to the history of Warmia and Mazury. In fact, their very names refer to regional toponyms. As many as five are Facebook pages. The longest-running is “Mazury według Jerzego – Archeologia, Historia, Etnografia” (2015), founded by Jerzy Łapo, archaeologist, doctor of history, journalist, curator of the Folk Culture Museum in Węgorzewo (*Lexicon of the Culture of Warmia and Mazury*, 2010). Both the title of the page and the description written by the author suggest that it is “a journey across Mazury through time and space” (“Mazury według Jerzego...”, 2015). The initiative aims to explore archaeological, historical and ethnographic issues relating to Mazury. Four years later, Wojciech Łukowski – sociologist, anthropologist and political scientist, professor at the University of Warsaw – launched the Facebook page “Mazurski Łącznik”. Its description states that it pursues “reflection on the region of Mazury in the global world” (“Mazurski Łącznik”, 2019), discussing history and philosophy in an essayistic and erudite manner. The third page, namely “Mityczna Stolica Mazur – Elk/Lyck”, started in 2020, is not concerned with the entire region but with its largest city and aims to “broaden the knowledge of local history” (“Mityczna Stolica Mazur Elk/Lyck”, 2020). The page’s creator, Stefan Michał Marcinkiewicz, is a sociologist, assistant professor at UWM in Olsztyn and also the author of an almost identically titled book, *Mityczna stolica Mazur. Między Elkiem a Lyck*. The Masurian town of Szczytno and its environs are provided another regional Facebook page: “Powiat Szczycieński i Okolice – Historia, Zabytki i Archiwalia” (2012), run by Witold Olbryś. Tomasz Brzozowski’s Facebook page “Wycieczki po Warmii i Innych Ziemiach Prusów i Krzyżaków” concentrates mainly on Warmia. The creator describes it as follows: “This is a site for the enthusiasts of discovering the history of Warmia and the entirety of the erstwhile Prussian and subsequently Teutonic lands, by exploring interesting and mysterious places which are not always widely known.” (“Wycieczki po Warmii i Innych Ziemiach Prusów i Krzyżaków”, 2012). One more catalogued medium dedicated to historical topics, but operating outside Facebook, is the YouTube channel “Mazurskie Tajemnice” (2016), run by Salesian and journalist Przemysław Kawecki. Passionate about the history of Mazury, the author describes

the object of his research thus: “This land delights the eye, stimulates the imagination and draws one with its secrets” (“Mazurskie Tajemnice”, 2016).

## Science

The media whose subject matter was described as scientific by their creators comprises undertakings by researchers and teachers at UWM in Olsztyn. “Profesorskie Gadanie”, the blog of dr hab. Stanisław Czachorowski, Associate Professor at the UWM Faculty of Biology and Biotechnology, is the longest-running – since 2005 – while since 2018 it has been available on the BlogSpot platform. Thematically, the blog is concerned with issues in biology, but the author also writes on topics related to academic life or lecturer-student relations.

In 2017, dr Szymon Żyliński, Assistant Professor at the UWM Institute of Journalism and Social Communication, started “Vlog Wykładowcy” on YouTube, focusing on science and new technologies. His videos address issues important to students, present new media projects carried out by the lecturer with the students, and provide information on studying abroad. Furthermore, in 2021, dr Miłosz Babecki, an Assistant Professor at the aforementioned institute, created “Met@phor\_Games”, Poland’s first-ever podcast exclusively covering video games.

## Social Issues

At present, there are three socially-themed media in the catalogue. The Elbląg Association for Supporting Non-Governmental Initiatives has run its YouTube channel, “Stowarzyszenie ESWIP”, since 2016. The material they upload often deals with niche yet vital topics of social life. Over the years, the association has also amassed an abundant archive of material on the undertakings of social activists in the region.

The Olsztyn-based blog “OlsztyńskieTramwaje.pl” has existed since 2009. The topics with which it is concerned – spanning public transport, tram routes, available rolling stock, and the construction of new tram lines, which has been underway for several years – are matters of considerable importance for the residents of Olsztyn and

visitors who use public transport. The third medium of the kind is “Info Elk – Blog Rafał Karaś” (2017), which functions on Facebook. The author described the blog as being socially oriented, e.g. listing regional tourism, infrastructure, militaria, and regional history as topics of interest.

### **Multi-Themed Media**

The last distinguished group encompasses multi-themed media, such as Piotr Karkoszka’s blog “Moja Warmia i Moje Mazury” (2015). It is a blog about the region’s nature, history, culture and community life, thus showing Warmia and Masuria from various perspectives whilst engaging with numerous topics. For example, contiguous tags on the blog – in alphabetical sequence in Polish – are “seagull”, “Nicolaus Copernicus”, and “Mrągowo”. Regarding the content, the author states: “First of all, descriptions of impressions from trips by canoe, bicycle, hiking, etc. Secondly, I wonder each time who has trodden these trails before me. This is a hell of an inspiring thing” (“Moja Warmia i Moje Mazury”).

Citizen media, which serve an informative function, have also been classified in this thematic group. They include “NewsBar. Magazyn Opinii z Warmii i Mazur”, which, as the website states, is edited by a group of independent journalists and features opinion-forming journalistic material that is lacking in the local media (“NewsBar. Magazyn Opinii z Warmii i Mazur”, 2007). It was created in 2007 by Sławomir Ostrowski, and a new version was launched in 2018. Another website is “Głosy Warmii i Mazur” (2021), a regional news portal founded by Mateusz Kossakowski, journalist, president of the Warmia and Mazury Branch of the Polish Journalists’ Association in Olsztyn and editor-in-chief of the portal. “Głosy Warmii i Mazur” publish news, as well as information relating to culture and sports in the region’s cities: Mrągowo, Mikołajki, Pieceki, Sorkwit, Giżycko, Ryn, Kętrzyn, Reszel, Szczytno, Olsztyn, and Pieniężno. As may be expected, the newsletter “Olsztyn. W Skrócie” (2021), founded by Paweł Harajda, is confined thematically to Olsztyn. Sent out on Saturdays, this weekly bulletin contains the most important news from the city, but there is no advertising, spam, or information about assaults, thefts or accidents.

Given that they provide general information, two media that qualify as multi-themed use the word “television” in their names; for the most part, their target audience is young people. One is „RzeczJasna TV” (2016), a website created by Kinga Wiśniewska, Karolina Iszoro and Tomasz Esden-Tempski. The creators outline its mission as follows: “The first, thoroughly social and civic online local television in Ostróda and the Ostróda District [...] will focus on topics which, although important, do not always break through to the mainstream local media” (“RzeczJasna TV”, 2016). The year 2019 also saw the launch of an independent YouTube channel MFM TV, which originated with the Mragowo Youth Forum.

## Conclusions

The media presented above may be categorized – though not without certain problems and simplifications – into six thematic groups, as shown in the table below.

Table 3.1. Themes in the studied media

Themes	Number of dedicated media
Lifestyle	13
Culture	12
History	6
Science	3
Social	3
Multi-themed	6

Source: own research.

Given the above, one may approach the range of themes identified across the surveyed citizen media as a diversified set. This diversity and multiplicity of topics, their fluidity – often even within one medium – appears to be a positive phenomenon, as it increases the number of potential recipients by providing content aimed at persons with distinct interests. At the same time, as M. Łosiewicz observes, the role of the audience is changing in the case of citizen media, as “they



can become active broadcasters and, thanks to the internet, create and disseminate their content” (Łosiewicz, 2015, p. 230). Civic media’s thematic diversification may contribute to audience expansion and encourage more creators to emerge.

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## Chapter 4

### Regional Embeddedness

*Joanna Szydłowska*

Reflection on the regional anchoring of the content of the interviews conducted as part of the work on the Catalogue of Citizen Media of Warmia and Mazury requires the researcher to draw on the apparatus of interdisciplinary research. The notions of region and regionalism are variedly defined and tend to have different semantic capacities and operational conclusiveness in particular sciences and research disciplines (Damrosz, 1987, 2007; Handke, 1993). From the standpoint of this inquiry, the most useful findings were those deriving from media studies, sociology, history and literary studies. The material collected for analysis was examined using media studies emphasizing the qualitative method. An algorithm referred to as the localness saturation index proved helpful in determining the degree of regional embeddedness of the media projects under consideration. A localness saturation index of 1–2 points was considered low, medium with the score 2–4 points and high with 5–7 points. Among the 43 citizen media from the Warmia and Mazury region included in the study, up to 28 (62.22%) were stated by their creators to represent a high degree of localness saturation. A medium level of localness saturation was determined for 11 media (24.44%), and a low level was observed in 4 cases (8.88%).

In sociological terms, regionalism is a concept which sets out to find correlations between the social awareness of specific groups and their activities (e.g. political, social, economic, cultural), which take place within a defined territory (Chudziński, 2008; 2010). Regionalism is presumed to represent a set of specific spiritual and material values, certain attitudes and judgments that have become established by links with a given region's material and non-material culture (Koćwin, 2000).

Thus, the inquiry focuses on, for example, the affiliation with the place, historically defined interpersonal relations, certain distinctive traits (ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, mental), cultural patterns arising in connection with social interaction and the use of a given territory and the sense of identification with a community (Omelaniuk, 2002).

In post-1945 Warmia and Mazury – as in other territories incorporated into Poland – the regionalist movement developed in peculiar circumstances (Nobis, Osękowski & Sakson, 2006), as it saw the encounter of the experiences and memories of various subjects: individuals displaced from the Polish and German borderlands, ethnic, religious and national minorities (Orłowski & Sakson, 1996). That period was characterized by a disruption of continuity in spatial, aesthetic, existential and commemorative dimensions (Szydłowska, 2013; Chłosta-Zielonka, 2010; Tumolska, 2007; Kledzik, Michalski & Praczyk, 2018). It was only after 1989 that there emerged a willingness to abandon the one-dimensional (Polish-centric) perception of the borderland. Thus, the “writing of Poland anew” (Szaruga, 1997) began, and grassroots civic energy yielded important initiatives (Cultural Community “Borussia”, The Masurian Community and “Dom Warmiński” Association). The turn of the century was marked in Warmia and Mazury by the conceptualization of the founding myths for a new model of practicing regional history (Orłowski, 2000, 2003; Brakoniecki, 1996). The following notions became its underpinning:

- Borussia as a pre-national and non-ideologized name for a geographical and historical territory;
- Atlantis of the North as a cultural myth and the idea of a mental community that brought people together across languages, cultures, history and politics;
- Open regionalism as a mode of writing the history of the region and Europe, unencumbered by the particularism of local milieus, dialogue-oriented, attentive to the voices of minorities and the issues of contemporary Europe, fighting for the “citizenization of culture”;
- ethical homelands as the reification of the idea of discourse spanning Polish, German, Russian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Warmian-Masurian traditions, the development of cross-border cultural awareness, building civil society; promoting tolerance.

In effect, one started to reflect on the meaning and ethics of inheriting places and memories. In this context, Robert Traba advocated the notion of cultural succession, “which links the memory of a place with the memory(ies) of the ‘local’ people and those who become locals in the second or third generation” (Traba, 2016, p. 97). The space one uses and the cultural landscape inscribed in it turned out to be a palimpsestic structure, while new epistemological tools enabled a contemporary reading of the meanings hidden there (Brakoniecki, 2003).

The turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed the inception of neo-regionalist practices, which constitute an extension and complement to regionalist undertakings. Neo-regionalists are distinguished by the generational characteristics (young generation), grassroots involvement and low hierarchization of structures (Wasilewski, 2022a), as well as by greater creativity in how they receive regional cultural heritage (Monday, 2011b).

In the adopted approach, citizen media are typified by “content created and shared by non-professional journalists, grassroots nature of activities and the dissemination of content independently of the mainstream media (with the caveat that the phenomenon of citizen journalism is increasingly exploited by media corporations), acting with the public good in mind”(Więckiewicz-Archacka, 2013, p. 546, 547). Citizen media play a serious role in media education in the regions. The content they propagate closely concerns a community established by inhabiting the same territory (real or imagined) and shared interests. They offer an opportunity to participate in regional and local projects, to learn through observation and involvement, and, if it happens online, to respond instantly to the publicized content. Their role in propagating knowledge about the cultural heritage of small homelands, languages, traditions, history and culture cannot be overestimated. Civic media have an impact on shaping cultural identity, fostering identification with specific ideas and values, and awakening a sense of local patriotism and commitment to the protection of the regional environment, as well as material and non-material cultural heritage. Citizen media journalists spread knowledge about local sites of remembrance (monuments, commemorative plaques, street patrons), and they create platforms to enable the exchange of ideas and spaces for public debate, thus contributing to the democratization of society (Jakubczak, 2020).

In the studied civic media in the region, regional content performs documentary, educational and identity-building functions. Media users appreciate the importance of such undertakings for community building and find them ethical. They feel the power of inheriting places, landscapes and values; they promote attitudes open to diversity and teach that memory and experience can be shared. One of the most interesting insights from the analysis of the interviews is that even news-focused outlets, which prioritize documenting the present day, cite the material dedicated to the region's history as their greatest achievements. In the case of "RzeczJasna TV", this applies to projects concerned with the settlement history in Mazury, the ethos of the pioneers, and the documentary interviews with senior citizens entitled "Stories of Lost Worlds". The opinion magazine "NewsBar..." prides itself on the multimedia projects developed by Sławomir Ostrowski ("Secret mission of the Masurians in the recollections of Józef Zapatka"; "Digital Map of the 1920 Plebiscite"; "The Synagogue of Barczewo: the Digital Edition"). Rev. Przemysław Kawecki ("Mazurskie Tajemnice") boasts meticulous documentation of the course of the Battle of Tannenberg, while Jerzy Łapo spotlights the material devoted to the mysteries of the Lehndorff family of Sztynort. The narratives about the history of local places have tremendous educational potential, as observed by Jerzy Łapo ("Mazury według Jerzego – Archeologia, Historia, Etnografia"), Kinga Wiśniewska, Tomasz Esden-Tempski ("Stowarzyszenie Inicjatyw Możliwych RzeczJasna"), among others. Media users learn how to tell stories and protect them from being forgotten.

Citizen media users practice a kind of rescue history in the sense defined by Ewa Domańska (2014). The rescue and documentary role of oral sources is appreciated by Tomasz Brzozowski ("Zaginiony Świat Południa Warmii"; "Wycieczki po Warmii i Innych Ziemiach Prusów i Krzyżaków"), who sets great store by private and family contacts with old Warmians: those who stayed in Poland and those who left for Germany after 1945. This is a very hermetic, distrustful community, which is why documented conversations with such persons become even more valuable sources of information about the past and present of that community, supplementing the narrative of public discourse.

The undertakings of Piotr Szatkowski (“Mazurskie Słódko na Dziś”) undoubtedly contribute to preserving the cultural heritage of the Masurian world as he collects records of the regional dialect and folklore. In a sense, his efforts follow in the footsteps of the folklore collectors from the late 1940s and early 1950s who, working with the Branch Office of the State Art Institute and the Olsztyn Office of the Inspectorate for Culture and Education “Czytelnik” (1948-1950), wrote down and recorded elements of the region’s oral culture (Chłosta, 1995). Jerzy Łapo’s mission (“Mazury według Jerzego – Archeologia, Historia, Etnografia”) is to popularize the regionalist mindset, promote attitudes geared towards the preservation of the cultural heritage of East Prussia and Mazury, and spread the notion that emotional adoption of places which once belonged to other national and ethnic entities is a beneficial endeavor.

The integrative and culture-building function is strongly present in many of the narratives. Many authors perceive neo-regionalist narratives as a counter-story to official/institutionalized regional and local narratives (ideological entanglements, anchoring in research tradition, factual errors, infantile mythography of the region). The citizen media studied here document a situation in which the narratives of professional scholars are replaced/supplemented by those of amateur regionalists. These new actors in the communication process are aware of how serious their activities are and see themselves as a group of activists who define themselves through a relationship with the small homeland, while their engagement is oriented towards the discourse of cultures of memory (Wasilewski, 2022b). They see citizen media as a major platform where identity-building may be practiced.

Pursuing region-related education, citizen journalists are looking for new tools to tell the story of the region and new topics. They try to find places that are not obvious, absent from the narratives of traditional travel guides or misrepresented. Thus, Rafał Karaś’s blog (“InfoElk”) shows former economic infrastructure (Mazury Canal, bridges in Stańczyki, mills and water locks) and military installations (Mamerki, Prostki). Witold Olbryś (“Powiat Szczycieński i Okolice – Historia, Zabytki i Archiwalia”) focuses on iconography (postcards and prints), telling the stories of their description, revealing the dramaturgy of fact-finding related to the depicted historical time, place, figure, or idea. In so doing, Olbryś

avoids a tawdry portraiture of the regional landscapes. Agata Grzegorzczak-Wosiek suggests an original approach (“Przepisy ze Śpiewnika/ Na Szlaku Smaku”), whereby she encourages one to explore the region through the history of taste and food culture, culinary infrastructure and recipes.

Karaś (“InfoElk”) draws on the mission of inheriting places and memories to engender meanings. The blogger popularizes the knowledge of the polymorphic nature of Mazury, a land where different nations coexisted for centuries, where languages, religions and denominations mixed; he promotes attitudes open to diversity and demonstrates that memory can be shared. Karaś also makes important observations on the symmetry of experiences of the Polish borderlanders and Germans/Masurians/Warmians expelled from their homes and on settling in, which may have taken long decades but still proved possible. The educational, integrative and culture-building mission reverberates quite tangibly in that narrative. Stefan Michał Marcinkiewicz (“Mityczna Stolica Mazur Elk/Lyck”) – who also studies Mazury as an academic – discusses the deficits of regional and local narratives, revisions of factual errors and the struggle against the infantile mythography of Mazury. The media narratives by Marcinkiewicz and Łukowski demonstrate that the synergy of approaches of an experienced scholar and a committed citizen journalist can be effective regarding knowledge yield and persuasion. For Marcinkiewicz, local history is a mirror that reflects considerably broader, i.e. Europe-wide, processes. The cultural landscape of Elk is, in fact, a record of chronologies, ideologies and aesthetics.

The author of “Mazurski Łącznik” also takes his presence in the world of the region seriously. For him, Mazury is not merely the setting of a private biography or a backdrop to family adventures but also an inspiration for intellectual activity. Read in this fashion, the region has an existential, phenomenological, epistemological and civic sense. Wojciech Łukowski treats the region (the localness of Giżycko) as a universe in which individual and community life become intimately intertwined. Being in the region is tantamount to being in the world because it is not confined to a purely geographical dimension. The language used to describe localness facilitates describing the world and vice versa. Seeing oneself in relation to a place is an identity-building step. The complicated history



of Mazury is an intellectual, emotional and ethical challenge. The figure of the “connection/liaison” is at once subjective and agential – epitomized in the author (native of Giżycko, an intellectual and researcher) – and objective, meaning the region entangled in the interplay between the center and the periphery.

Piotr Karkoczka (“Moja Warmia i Moje Mazury”) adopted an interesting modality to practice the space of the region. Dedicated to the natural scenery of the region, his blog grows out of a deep immersion in its historical and cultural landscape. Karkoczka deliberately draws on the knowledge of his predecessors, adding his comments on the margins of impressions recorded by travelers, artists, reporters and researchers (including Melchior Wańkiewicz, Igor Neverly, Karol Małek). The uniqueness of those reflections stems from the fact that while looking at the landscapes of the region, the author takes advantage of the epistemological tools of the sciences, mainly quantum physics. The relationships between science, literature, and the participants’ reportorial approach lend a highly original structure to that narrative.

The non-repressive horizontal communication characteristic of citizen media (independence from the state as well as the party and corporate system, the process of collecting and sharing information is not subject to control) fosters integration and the emergence of new communities based on virtual communication (Barney, Dijk & Maffesoli, 2008). The analysis confirms that citizen media are a domain where vital decisions are made regarding the self-identification of the broadcasting subject as well as where methodological, technological, knowledge-related and ethical challenges are resolved (Zwiefka-Chwałek, 2009). The blog “InfoElk” is a platform where one reflects on identity and seeks to build it. Blogger Rafał Karaś is aware of the public debate about the post-migration borderland and readily speaks out on this issue. His opinions are formulated based on reading but also derive from the private migration experience of his family and the emotions associated with being embedded in the world after the Yalta Conference. The family’s exile lineage is also underscored by Wojciech Łukowski (“Mazurski Łącznik”), whose parents were displaced from the Borderlands. In his story, the experience of the mid-1940s is multiplied by the experience of the Masurians of Giżycko, who left for West Germany twenty years later. The unexpected discovery

that some members of his family are of Masurian descent became a major impetus for Piotr Szatkowski's media activity ("Mazurskie Słódko na Dziś"). Szatkowski does note that the blurring of the identity of the region's contemporary inhabitants is an issue, as it implies that their identification with the place has become more tenuous. Simultaneously, it signals the exhaustion of the monolithic paradigms under which subjects and communities were defined in line with the nationalist notions of the past century, including the fundamental dichotomies of Polishness-Germanness. Unlike his eminent predecessors – Karol Malłek, Eugeniusz Bielawski, and Jan Kawecki – Szatkowski does not have to prove that Masurian culture is Polish, but articulates its hybrid aspect.

The regional profile of identity is prominently present in the case of Tomasz Brzozowski („Zaginiony Świat Południa Warmii”; „Wycieczki po Warmii i Innych Ziemiach Prusów i Krzyżaków”). “I am a Warmian going generations back, and that's that, this is the most important land here” (“Wycieczki po Warmii i Innych Ziemiach Prusów i Krzyżaków”), the author explicitly asserts his descent and thematic priorities. First of all, the status of Brzozowski's citizen media stems from the fact that he launched a pioneering group on Facebook, which brings together enthusiasts of Warmia who are keen to study/explore the land. Secondly, his narrative about Warmia takes into account the voices of the Warmians who left for Germany after 1945. They also have their own stories, their own memory and their own places of remembrance, Brzozowski argues. Apart from the integrating (community-building) function, one should also pursue vital educational goals, disseminating knowledge about Warmia's past, including its pre-1945 history. Brzozowski takes an interesting approach to the fluctuation of actors narrating the region's history: “local leaders of memory” (Wasilewski, 2022b, p. 12, 179), and “makers of memory” (Kačka, 2015). Professional historians are gradually being replaced by amateur regionalists who – by no means feeling inferior – take advantage of state-of-the-art communication tools to reach a different audience and give a different account of the past. Brzozowski's example confirms the findings by Wasilewski, whereby those new actors in the communication process are aware of the seriousness of their efforts and see themselves as activists who seek self-definition in relation

to their small homelands and prioritize the discourse of cultures of memory (Wasilewski, 2022b, p. 12, 183).

The historical and cultural aspects of regional themes in Warmia and Mazury are highly fascinating for the citizen media entities that study them. These themes provide original content and knowledge with tremendous educational potential. They also pose a formal challenge, encouraging experimentation with the technique of delivery. Moreover, these themes are recognized and appreciated by prestigious bodies and have the potential to become flagship products of individual broadcasting entities. Additionally, they serve as a tool for building and consolidating a community around specific themes and values. The private and institutionalized stories about the region and regional identifications are now inclusive; history increasingly unites rather than divides, while the residents of the borderland increasingly feel like the hosts of the spaces they inhabit. The region is also an important element in civic debate, as it involves multiple actors, while its discursive potential transcends regional boundaries.

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## Chapter 5

### Creator Profiles

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#### Introduction: Localness as the Common Denominator

Citizen media, which in this study are narrowed down to the Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury, are typified by one of their most salient traits, namely localness. In a sense, the latter is the common denominator for nearly all creators analyzed in the catalogue, enabling one to look at civic media in the context of local media as well. They have invariably emerged on the substrate of local communities, localness, and localisms, i.e. such structures which are currently experiencing a social renaissance. This may be seen not only in the return to a qualitatively altered localism but also in the departure from the structures of global society, prompting such ideas as the much-promoted return to nature, slow life or the emergence of the logged-out generation (Myślak, 2021, pp. 122, 123).

Nowadays, localness fulfils a vital function, as it also responds to the so-called information overload and “over-informed depression”, most often experienced as a “reality loss” manifesting in the blurred distinction between fiction and reality. The excess of ubiquitous information engenders a feeling of helplessness, general disorientation and, in consequence, a social shift “towards its own experienced world and trusted surroundings, one’s life environment and close personal space, in which it is possible [...] to comprehend phenomena and processes through information” (Michalczyk, 2000, p. 8).

That shift also involves a return to the essential human needs and expectations related to territoriality, native space or a small homeland,

where the sense of security, the knowledge of structures, as well as geographical, political and social orientation, are virtually palpable. This “territorial demarcation from foreign interests” (Michalczyk, 2000, p. 8) – which also provides a basis for self-identification – fosters anthropological anchoring because wherever they live, people are always embedded in a specific place which affords them a sense of security (also in socio-cultural terms), support and permanence. Thus, localness becomes an anthropologically inseparable element, a bond between the individual and a given place, one which they miss and on which they are dependent.<sup>1</sup> This triggers emotional and psychological factors which translate into “the need to identify with a place, to integrate with other members [...]. The role of local media stems from the communicative and societal-social importance of the local world, of the immediate space” (Michalczyk, 2000, p. 8).

In times of mass media dominance, (dis)information overload, and living in a global village, the individual finds it increasingly difficult to extract what is really important and true. Not every generation is capable of verifying information, checking sources and refraining from passing on fake news. Therefore, the verifiable and territorially anchored information originating from a small homeland – meaning local information – becomes particularly important today. Local media are part of the media system, a foundation on which regional and national media develop. Their power and potential impact on reality were already evident in the 1990s when local media were seen as an opportunity for new governance and the state system, while today, every political party has its own regional structures (Michalczyk, 2000, pp. 13, 14, 168). Their strength is also shown in the localness saturation index, which was declared high for most of the media projects studied.

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<sup>1</sup> In the book entitled *Regionalizm 2.0. Media hiperlokalne i małe ojczyzny*, Krzysztof Wasilewski observes that nowadays the terms “region” and “regionalism” evoke particular emotions, stemming the fact that they “refer to what is often closest for many people: their family home or neighbourhood and the memories associated with it”, they bear the mark of human “roots of origins”, which are tended to by means of contemporary media tools. See Wasilewski (2022, pp. 6, 7).

## Creator Profiles

The following characterization of online creators from Warmia and Mazury relied on the analysis of more than forty interviews with persons involved in citizen media in the region.

The first element to note when cataloguing the authors of particular media projects is that they are largely created by men. As many as 63% of the creators are male (see Fig. 5.1), while the authorship of 25% of the projects was attributed to women. Mixed-gender teams were behind only five of the entire set of analyzed media, including “Archipelagi Kultury Warmii i Mazur” (Facebook profile), “RobiMy Podróże. Na Dwóch Nogach i Czterech Kołach” (blog), “Stowarzyszenie ESWIP” (YouTube channel), “Szalone Walizki” (blog) and the website “RzeczJasna TV.”

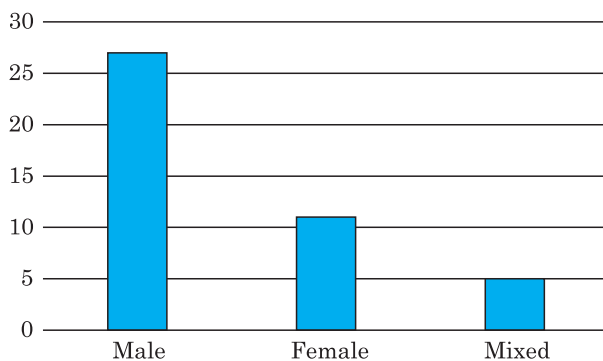


Figure 5.1. Creators by gender  
Source: own research.

Most surveyed creators have a university background – such a declaration was made by just over 80% of interviewees. The remaining citizen journalists in the catalogue described their education level as secondary. The group who released the “Małomiasteczkowi” podcast were an exception, being secondary school students; consequently, their level of education was defined as primary.

The vast majority have graduated from higher schools. Although persons with journalistic experience may indeed be found among the creators, the professions they represent are extremely diverse. For instance, several citizen journalists have a **background in journalism:**

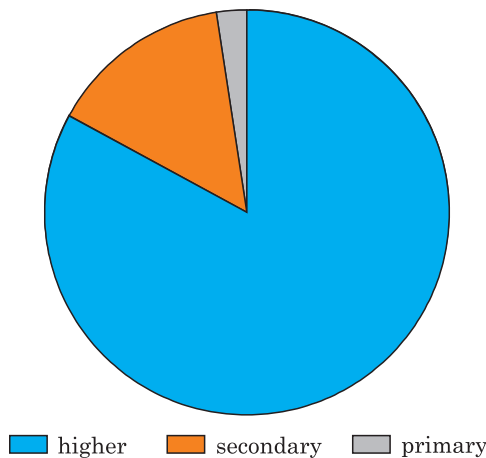


Figure 5.2. Creators by educational background  
Source: own research.

Marta Wiśniewska (“Periodista Marta”), Miłosz Babecki (“Met@phor\_Games”), Szymon Żyliński (“Vlog Wykładowcy”), Hanna Łozowska (“Halo Książki”), Sylwia Warzechowska (“Stowarzyszenie ESWiP”), Jarosław Kowalski (“Szalone Walizki”) and Tomasz Loewnau (“Rap-nau”). The analyzed group also includes **entrepreneurs**: Dorota Gil-Kowalska (“Szalone Walizki”), Rafał Karaś (“Info Ełk”), Paweł Harajda (“Olsztyn. W Skrócie”) and Karolina Rogóż-Namietko (“Lejdi Gada czyli Kobiety przy Mikrofonie”). **Teachers** feature quite numerously among the respondents (Witold Olbryś, “Powiat Szczycieński i Okolice – Historia, Zabytki i Archiwalia”), as well as academics (Bernadetta Darska, Miłosz Babecki, Szymon Żyliński, Stanisław Czachorowski). Furthermore, a number of creators are **currently studying**, such as the authors of the “Klamka Zapadła” channel and owners of the TikTok accounts “Pani Etykieta” and “Wjakweterynaria”. Other occupations mentioned by the online authors included IT specialist (Tomasz Brzozowski, “Zaginiony Świat Południa Warmii”), archaeologist (Jerzy Łapo, “Mazury według Jerzego...”), salesperson (Grzegorz Komorowski, “Olsztyn po Mojemu”), gym instructor (Aleksander Chmarycz, “Klamka Zapadła”), electrician (Jakub Kolberg, “Klamka Zapadła”) and an employee at the Voivodeship Police Headquarters (Jakub Hajaduk, “Jadenarowerze.pl”). The following excerpts from the interviews offer some interesting insights into the authors’ education or professional experience:



Reverend, parish priest of the Polish Catholic Mission in Berlin (Przemysław Kawecki, “Mazurskie Tajemnice”).

I graduated from Scandinavian Studies, specializing in Danish, so I've often worked with the Danish language as a researcher or a translator (Piotr Szatkowski, “Mazurskie Słówko na Dziś”).

I've been a commercial photographer for 12 years, and I run a photography studio. I cooperate with several companies, with “Gazeta Wyborcza”, and with the “Made in Warmia & Mazury” magazine (Arkadiusz Stankiewicz, “Drony Warmińskie”).

I am a proud graduate of the University of Gdańsk. I'm a political scientist by education. I'm also an entrepreneur, and I have a natural stone store in Elk, so it's quite an original profession because we import stones from all over the world. [...] Councilor for the city of Elk (Rafał Karaś, “Info Elk”).

[...] I completed my studies in Krakow in Psychology at the Jagiellonian University [...]. At first, I worked as a psychologist in a psychological-pedagogical counselling center and as a coach in various organizations. Now I'm the president of the Foundation of Alternative Education ALE in Mragowo (Aleksandra Lemańska, “MFM TV”).

I have a background in Hungarian studies. I took up working as a journalist while still a student and continued for a total of 15 years as a journalist and radio presenter in newspapers and in the online media as well. After that, I went into diplomacy, and since 2011, I have been working in the diplomatic service, currently at the Polish embassy in Budapest (Marcin Bobiński, “OlsztyńskieTramwaje.pl”).

In their survey report on Internet use in Poland in 2022, analysts of the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) observed that online presence depends primarily on age and, among older respondents, on their education as well. The report states that “respondents with higher education account for the largest number of internet users”, on top of which “professional activity contributes to internet use” (*Komunikat z badań...*, 2022). These findings were also corroborated by the results of the analysis concerning online creators from Warmia and Mazury.

As many as 93 % of creators live in the Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury. More than half (51%) are residents of Olsztyn. Other places of residence indicated by the interviewees include Bartąg, Wipsowo, Elk,

Kętrzyn, Giżycko, Węgorzewo, Mragowo, Szczytno, Morąg, Elbląg and Ostróda. Two persons declared a dual location of their media activity, i.e. the originator of the blog “OlsztyńskieTramwaje.pl” (Olsztyn and Budapest) and the author of the podcast “Met@phor\_Games” (Olsztyn and Iława). A number of creators of the studied media were from outside Warmia and Mazury: blog “Halo Książki. Hanna Łozowska” (Gdańsk), YouTube channel “Mazurskie Tajemnice” by Przemysław Kawecki (Berlin), website “Mazurskie Słódko na Dziś” by Piotr Szatkowski (Gdańsk) and the blog “Moja Warmia i Moje Mazury” by Piotr Karkoszka (Warsaw). As Krzysztof Wasilewski observes, it is a characteristic of the age of online society and digital regionalism that direct ties between regionalists and their “small homeland” are disrupted (Wasilewski, 2022, p. 224). This researcher further notes that in many cases, those who run profiles dedicated to Mazury, for example, no longer live there or have never been associated with it (Wasilewski, 2022, p. 224). However, the rule does not apply to the creators participating in this study, as most are based in the region in question (Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury, mainly Olsztyn).

The authors included in the catalogue represent a broad range of ages, from 16 to 69 years old.

The interviewed creators are in the 16–69 age range. As can be seen from Figure 5.3, those **over 40** are the most numerous group. Authors of the “Małomiasteczkowi” podcast (aged 16) were outside the indicated age groups.

As noted above, persons aged 40 and above constitute the largest group of citizen media authors. In terms of demographics, this includes Generation X, Y (Millennials) and Generation C. At this point, it must be stressed that the time intervals for these generations are largely a matter of convention. For instance, Generation X may be argued to include persons born between 1965-1984 or 1965-1976, Millennials are said to have been born between 1977/1980 and 2000, while Generation C includes those born after 1990<sup>2</sup>, whereby such a timeframe overlaps slightly with the aforementioned Generation Y (Myślak, 2021, pp. 104-112).

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<sup>2</sup> Certain researchers also maintain that the term denotes persons born between 1982 and 1996 or 1982 and 2001, which suggests that belonging to this generation is determined by the moment when the internet and social media became established

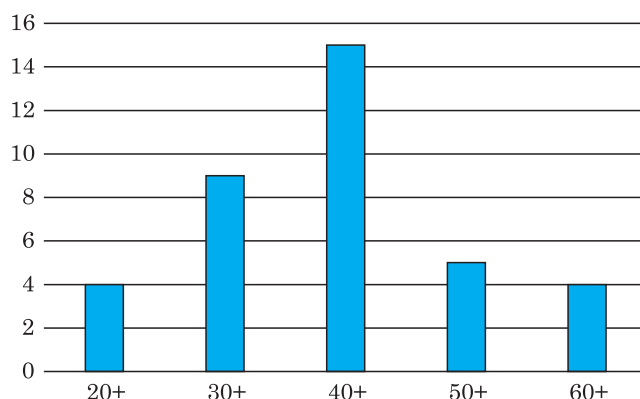


Figure 5.3. Creators by age  
Source: own research.

Generation X<sup>3</sup> is characterized by pessimism, individualism, communicativeness, self-development, empathy, advanced education level and a proclivity for reflection. For them, work is not a supreme value but rather a means to ensure an adequate standard of living. They are capable of objectively assessing the inefficiency of the authorities but hardly become involved in any elections and are sometimes described as rebellious (Myślak, 2021, pp. 104, 105).

With respect to media development, that generation has had to find its bearings in the ongoing technical and technological revolution as a transitional generation between the old and the new media. Such a relationship may be seen among some of the creators included in the study, who – just as is typical of Generation X – usually treat email or telephones as the primary tool for communicating concise content. Another characteristic of the group is the efficient use of online resources, but the online network is not their most important tool of communication (nor is social media), which is also noticeable among some of the creators presented in the catalogue (e.g. “Mazurski Łącznik”, “NewsBar. Magazyn Opinii z Warmii i Mazur”).

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in everyday life, resulting in the emergence of “digital natives”. However, that did not occur at the same point in time across the world.

<sup>3</sup> The designation was coined by Douglas Coupland in *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, which speaks of a generation that did not want to have any label attached to them, hence they were simply called X. In turn, this is where the subsequent Generation Y derived its name.

In contrast, age-wise, Generation Y encompasses both today's 20- and 40-year-olds. Hence, they are familiar with electronic devices such as computers, laptops and smartphones; their skillset enables them to use the internet and social media, which are a permanent part of their reality. Tomasz Goban-Klas stresses that this is a fast-living generation, ceaselessly bombarded with images and addicted to receiving new stimuli all the time. Although they feel fatigue (overload) caused by the continual stream of information, they cannot live without it. Millennials are active<sup>4</sup>, accustomed to innovation and prefigurative, a generation loyal to social media (while abandoning their traditional counterparts), which they consider a lively, virtual and attractive community (Myślak, 2021, p. 109).

Finally, the citizen media creators participating in the study can also be classified in the age group known as Generation C. The latter "were born and grew up in the digital age and therefore do not know a world without computers and the internet. They simultaneously lead and partake in two lives: real and virtual. Thanks to smartphones and social networks, they are constantly 'connected' to the global information network, being online 24 hours a day" (Myślak & Siudak, 2016, p. 7). The generation takes its name from the words beginning with the letter C which characterize it: connect/connection (number of interactions with other people), communicate/community (need for constant communication with many groups at the same time), change, creation/creativity (with respect to content or reality), content (building a media community), control (selectively uploaded content; a desire to have influence and control), curation (searching for, analyzing and evaluating content), celebrity (creating, commenting, powerful need to be known to a broader public). It is often said of Generation C that they

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<sup>4</sup> Compared with its predecessors, Generation Y is "distinguished by an undisguised conviction of its uniqueness, self-confidence, high competence level and entrepreneurial spirit. Generation Y prefers choice rather than using ready-made offers. As persons with above-average flexibility, they adapt quickly to new circumstances in their professional and private lives and readily become familiar with technical and technological novelties. They maintain a sensible and critical approach to the world around them. Generation Y values social work, diversity, tolerance and trust. They have a sense of and need for physical activity. They are sensitive to emphasis on hierarchical relationships". See more in Myślak (2021, p. 110).

are “always on” or “always connected”. They are thoroughly immersed in digital technology and, therefore, tend to be considered a more radical variant of Millennials – genuine digital natives.

The citizen media analyzed in this monograph date from between 2005 and 2022. There is no one particular reason why their creators embarked on such an activity. As the interviews demonstrate, their motivations varied. For example:

[...] our dream was to write this blog and make enough money from it to finance our travels (“Szalone Walizki”);

The idea was born out of a need that wasn’t mine only, but also people’s, as the mragowo24info portal, which had existed for several years, was shutting down. There was no such portal in the Mragowo district (“Głosy Warmii i Mazur”);

I started the blog in early 2018. It somehow stemmed from a need I had to share what was currently going on in my life (“Lejdi Gada...”);

It was just that I felt the need to share what I see in Olsztyn precisely as regards these spatial forms and what’s happening in the space in terms of making minimalist photographs (“Minimal Olsztyn”).

A number of creators were even unable to define the circumstances in which their media started: “As a typical enthusiast and amateur, I just don’t remember. The passion dates back to many years ago. It simply began with curiosity about the world, curiosity about our region” (Info Elk). The motivations of the surveyed creators are discussed in greater detail in the following chapters of this monograph (see more in Chapter 4).

It follows from the analysis of the collected material that the greatest proportion of the studied media projects were created between 2019 and 2021 (Fig. 5.4). That period may be linked to the global COVID-19 pandemic, given that in March 2020, the outbreak in Wuhan (China) was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. Patrycja Cheba notes that according to the research conducted by strategy agency LoveBrands Relations, almost 47 % of the respondents in Poland began to follow an increased number of creators during the COVID-19 pandemic (Raport LoveBrands Relations, 2021, after Cheba, 2022, p. 78).

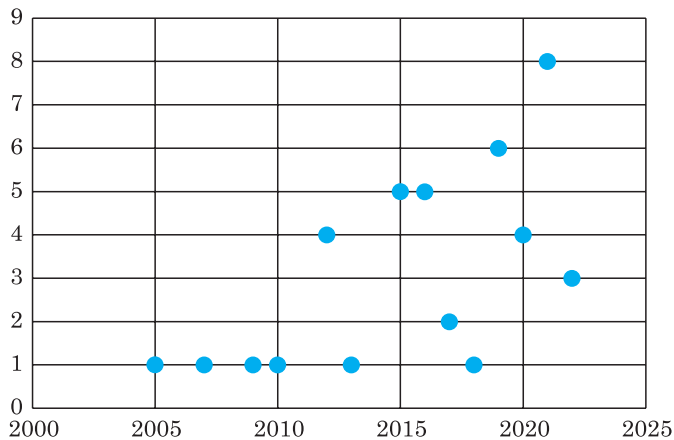


Figure 5.4. Year of creation

Source: own research.

In the interviews conducted with the creators of online citizen media of Warmia and Mazury, the pandemic also appears to have been a catalyst which precipitated the decision to launch a medium. This is reflected, for example, in the statement by Julia Gadomska, or “Pani Etykieta”:

The inspiration to take action came from the pandemic. That’s when remote teaching started, and I realized how much free time I had that I could use in an interesting way. That’s when I became interested in good manners to the extent that I was able to talk about the subject and already had quite a lot of knowledge in the area of *savoir vivre*. So, I decided that it’d be fun to share it with others (“Pani Etykieta”).

## Relationships with Audiences

Mass media have accustomed us to a vertical, top-down interaction, where one speaks to many, and the majority have virtually no opportunity to react and respond to the message. This has changed with the spread of new media and later social media, where the pattern has been completely reversed. Communication has grown more horizontal, lowering the boundary between sender and receiver (who may alternate in these roles) and reducing the response time tremendously.

For an overwhelming majority of the creators taking part in the study, interaction with their audiences is self-evident; it is an element that they nurture and which operates bi-directionally. The interviewees described their relationship with the audiences and contact with the latter, as: **very important** (e.g. “Halo Książki”, “Małomiasteczkowi”, “Mazurskie Słódko na Dziś”, “Pani Etykieta”, “Stowarzyszenie ESWIP”, “Wjak-weterynaria”), **important** (e.g. “Warmia Bike”, “Pstryk z Olsztyna”, “Powiat Szczycieński i Okolice – Historia, Zabytki i Archiwalia”, “Klamka Zapadła”, “Lejdi Gada...”, “Blog Autorski Tomasza Białkowskiego”, “Mazurskie Tajemnice”, “Zaginiony Świat Południa Warmii”), **crucial** (e.g. “Mazurski Łącznik”, “RobiMy Podróże...”). Only one of the respondents – “NewsBar. Magazyn Opinii z Warmii i Mazur” – answered that there was no contact with the audience (“I only get individual opinions along the lines of ‘that was cool’, ‘that was good’, ‘oh, that’s new’. But an opinion expressed by any larger group is unknown to me.”)<sup>5</sup>

The interaction would usually take place **through social media** (“most often via Facebook. Via Facebook, because that’s where we mainly exchange our information with the listeners, really” “Warmia Bike”); it would also ensue in **comments under posts** – as stated by 27 respondents (“We write back very quickly, that contact is important for us and we also see how important it is for our audience” “Szalone Walizki”); “Usually it’s messages sent to OlsztyniAnka, and comments to posts where people are happy that they found out about these classes, that they’ve been there, that they’ve benefited, that they recommend them” (“OlsztyniAnka”), **likes on posts** or **private messages** (e.g. “OlsztyńskieTramwaje.pl”). The respondents also mentioned **direct interactions via InstaStory** and **livestreams on Instagram** (e.g. “Klamka Zapadła”) and exchange of emails (e.g. “Lejdi Gada...”). The respondents also cited **live broadcasts, chat and communication using Discord** (“Rapnau”), **number of page impressions** (e.g. “Now there’re about 200 daily on the blog, it used to be 2-3, so that’s the difference” – “Profesorskie Gadanie”), **visit counter** (“In my case, the main thing is that I get to see on the blog that someone’s been here, right, read it, through the visit counter” – “Nowości Książkowe – Blog Bernadetty Darskiej”).

<sup>5</sup> This is largely due to the lack of the comments section. The only feedback comes from what the audience send directly to the Author.

It is worth noting to whom the respondents addressed their medium and whom it actually reached. Typically, the creators described their initial target as **global** (“global, to the world” – “Archipelagi Kultury Warmii i Mazur”; “global, without reception criteria, interested in literature, with a sense of aesthetics” – “Blog Autorski Tomasza Białkowskiego”; “everybody” – “Czarne szkło”; “global, young people” (18-22), “active Instagram users” – “Drony Warmińskie”; “audience of all ages, without any additional restrictions here [...] across the age and gender divide” – “Met@phor\_Games”; “I try to have it addressed as widely as possible” – “OlsztyńskieTramwaje.pl”; “I’d like to address this medium to virtually everyone in terms of age; preferably people with at least secondary and higher education and those who enjoy so-called intelligent entertainment” – “Periodista Marta”; “for everyone” – “RobiMy Podróże...”; “people from every age group communicate with us, it’s different people depending on the channel” – “Szalone Walizki”; “I think to everyone really. I don’t focus on any particular audience” – “Wjakwetrynaria”).

There were also voices in favor of a **strictly (trans)local/nationwide audience** (“Info Elk”, “Minimal Olsztyn”<sup>6</sup>, “OlsztyniAnka”<sup>7</sup>, “Powiat Szczygieński i Okolice – Historia, Zabytki i Archiwalia”<sup>8</sup>, “Przepisy ze Śpiewnika”<sup>9</sup>, “Pstryk z Olsztyna”<sup>10</sup>, “RzeczJasna TV”<sup>11</sup>, “Zaginiony Świat Południa Warmii”<sup>12</sup>, “Klamka Zapadła”<sup>13</sup>, “I am only Ania”<sup>14</sup>, “Mazurskie Słódko na Dziś”<sup>15</sup>, “Mityczna Stolica Mazur – Elk/Lyck”<sup>16</sup>), **young people exclusively** (“Drony Warmińskie”, “I Am Only Ania”,

<sup>6</sup> “Olsztyn and its environs.”

<sup>7</sup> “Individuals living in and around Olsztyn. Families with children. Not only, though”.

<sup>8</sup> “People interested in the history of the Szczytno District as well as Mazury and former East Prussia in general”.

<sup>9</sup> “People with similar origins (borderlanders)”.

<sup>10</sup> “Residents of Olsztyn”.

<sup>11</sup> “We’re grounded in localness and what that audience of ours is like and it’s that audience which, you know, inspires us the most”.

<sup>12</sup> “It’s more of a local audience or one that’s connected to this very land. You could say that the people who have left it is our particular kind of audience”.

<sup>13</sup> “Nationwide”.

<sup>14</sup> “Young people, the entire Poland”.

<sup>15</sup> Two target groups: 1. The actual descendants of the Masurians; 2. Everyone who lived or lives in the region; people aged 50 and above.

<sup>16</sup> “Translocal, people living in and around Elk”.



“Małomiasteczkowi”<sup>17</sup>, “MFM TV”<sup>18</sup>, “Pani Etykieta”<sup>19</sup>, “Profesorskie Gadanie”<sup>20</sup>, “Rapnau”<sup>21</sup>), as well as those which **envisaged no target audience** of their activities (e.g. “Vlog Wykładowcy”, “Olsztyn. W Skrócie”, „Olsztyn po Mojemu”, „Nowości książkowe – Blog Bernadetty Darskiej”, „Moja Warmia i Moje Mazury”, „Mazury według Jerzego...”, „Halo Książki”).

Groups cited as the intended audience also included people directly involved in the subject matter of a given medium, such as **cycling enthusiasts** (“Jadenarowerze.pl”, “Warmia Bike”), **football fans** (“Klamka Zapadła”), **“people who take pleasure in eating”** (“Kulinaryny Olsztyn”), “people associated with the third sector or to people who keenly engage with social issues” (“Stowarzyszenie ESWIP”)<sup>22</sup>.

Reality has repeatedly put the plans to reach a particular audience to the test. For instance, the actual audience of “Archipelagi Kultury Warmii i Mazur” consists of 364 people, including persons aged 45–54 (17% women, 15% men), whereas those aged 18–24 accounted for only 1% of the total audience. Next to people interested in literature and aesthetics, “Blog Autorski Tomasza Białkowskiego” has also drawn readers interested in architecture and travel.

The functionalities offered by the internet usually result in a much broader actual audience than originally intended (nationwide<sup>23</sup>, “we’ve gone beyond Olsztyn”<sup>24</sup>). Thus, a proportion of the creators have reached international audiences (“Warmia Bike”, “Jadenarowerze.pl”, “Mityczna Stolica Mazur Elk/Lyck”, “Przepisy ze Śpiewnika”, “Vlog Wykładowcy”).

<sup>17</sup> “Young people, school pupils”.

<sup>18</sup> “Young people”.

<sup>19</sup> “Primarily high school and uni age, adolescents”.

<sup>20</sup> “Initially students, later the group grew broader. At the same time, it was noticing those non-academic audiences too. That is, not just the students themselves, not just the scientists”.

<sup>21</sup> “Young people interested in Polish rap, artists”.

<sup>22</sup> Listeners of the *Met@phor\_Games* podcast are likely to constitute such passionate audience as well. Nothing to that effect is stated in the interview, but given the subject matter of the medium, enthusiasts of video, computer, and online games may have been its intended audience.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. “I am Only Ania”, “Jadenarowerze”, “Nowości książkowe – Blog Bernadetty Darskiej”.

<sup>24</sup> “Minimal Olsztyn”.

In such cases, next to local readers, listeners or viewers, there is also a translocal and nationwide audience, as well as the Polish diaspora<sup>25</sup>.

In a number of instances, the actual audience fully overlapped with the intended target (“InfoEłk”, “MFM TV”, “OlsztyniAnka”, “Powiat Szczycieński i Okolice – Historia, Zabytki i Archiwalia”, “Rapnau”, “RzeczJasna TV”, “Zaginiony Świat Południa Warmii”), while positive surprises were in evidence as well, when e.g. “Jadenarowerze.pl”, “Mazurskie Słódko na Dziś”, and “Pani Etykieta” effectively reached much younger persons than they had intended.

In the interviews, the creators would also note that their projects – not necessarily intentionally – draw a particular gender. For instance, media such as „Czarne szkło”<sup>26</sup>, „Halo książki”<sup>27</sup>, „Klamka Zapadła”<sup>28</sup>, „Lejdi Gada...”<sup>29</sup>, „Mityczna Stolica Mazur Ełk/Lyck”<sup>30</sup>, „Pani Etykieta”<sup>31</sup>, „Szalone Walizki”<sup>32</sup>, „Vlog Wykładowcy”<sup>33</sup> have a predominantly female audience.

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<sup>25</sup> Besides local audience, “Warmia Bike” has followers in Portugal, Italy and the United States. “They’re probably native to these parts who want to listen, they want to go back to these topics, they want to listen about Warmia, they want to listen about what is happening [here]” (“Warmia Bike”). Around 17% of the viewers of “Vlog Wykładowcy” are from countries other than Poland. Meanwhile, *Przepisy ze śpiewnika* are read by Poles residing permanently abroad: “Here, it turned out, for example, that there’s huge response from the Polish community abroad, very many hits from around the world in general, I believe, because if it’s from Japan, there’s that visit there, from somewhere else, from all over the world, I suspect those are Poles, because I blog in Polish, so I think that people far away from the country, feeling a certain nostalgia, are more inclined to reach for such that story” (“Przepisy ze Śpiewnika”).

<sup>26</sup> There are more women, though in view of the posted content – pictures of women, including nudes – one would anticipate a higher proportion of men among the audience.

<sup>27</sup> Prevalence of women aged 25–50.

<sup>28</sup> 80% of the Instagram audience are women aged 18–26.

<sup>29</sup> Mainly women aged 20–60.

<sup>30</sup> Majority are women, chiefly middle-aged from outside Ełk.

<sup>31</sup> 85% are women, people much younger than intended, aged 11–50.

<sup>32</sup> “When it comes to Instagram, Facebook, it’s mainly ladies, a lot of ladies, a large predominance of ladies”.

<sup>33</sup> 50.1% women.

## Conclusions

An overview of the channels used to deliver content warrants the conclusion that standard websites are a less frequent form of communicating the material one has created. Creators from Warmia and Mazury overwhelmingly employ social media (most often Facebook) to reach their audience. Importantly, the majority opt for a multi-channel strategy, operating simultaneously on several social media platforms (most often Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube).

Interaction with their audiences takes place primarily through social media. This two-way, bidirectional relationship is quite natural (even self-explanatory) given the present-day realities. The media reality – in its current “instant” format – compels both senders and receivers to react quickly. Social media, which helps creators connect with their audiences, performs splendidly here. Based on the information from the respondents, it was fairly clear that in most cases, the actual audience overlapped with the intended one, but there was often a “bonus” of drawing views and visits from outside the region, country or continent.

“The internet, social media in particular, is also a place where the dominant notions of a territory – a town, a village, a street, a cemetery, etc. – are negotiated. The participants in this process originate from various social and professional groups, but they are united by their passion for the history, culture and traditions of their surroundings, which they most often call their ‘small homeland’. Digital regionalists, as they may be called, have already become a permanent feature in the landscape of social platform users” (Wasilewski, 2022, p. 5). Such conclusions may also be drawn after a preliminary analysis of interviews with more than 40 citizen media creators from Warmia and Mazury. Although not all of them address local issues directly, the degree of their social engagement and interest in regional affairs seems to exceed the standard.

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## Chapter 6

### Principal Motivations of Creators

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Citizen media could not exist were it not for the intrinsic motivation of their creators. Since they are non-commercial and their main goal is other than profit, a question it may be worthwhile to answer concerns the reasons which prompt their authors to embark on such an undertaking.

In Poland, research into the motivations for engaging in non-commercial media activity online was conducted in late 2008 – early 2009 by Marta Juza and Michał Piotr Pręgowski. They studied two specific communities, i.e. fans of Star Trek and the NHL, the North American professional ice hockey league. Based on in-depth interviews with the creators of the respective community websites, they identified three basic groups of motivations. In the first group, they included those related to the individual and their singular characteristics. Here, reasons for involvement included interest in a particular topic, the desire to have fun, spend time with people interested in a particular field, develop personally, satisfy the need for respect and recognition from others, seek self-actualization and satisfy the need to belong. The second identified group encompassed motivations oriented towards one's own community (the desire to develop and nurture the community and the phenomenon, sharing knowledge and working for the community's benefit). The third category spanned motivations of a societal nature (promoting a given brand, propagating knowledge about a given phenomenon, and raising public awareness of a particular fandom to which one belongs) (Juza & Pręgowski, 2010).

Similar motivations accompany those engaging in online media activity. Kamil Jakubczak, author of the doctoral dissertation entitled

*Dziennikarstwo obywatelskie w polskiej przestrzeni medialnej. Perspektywa teologii kultury*, observes as follows:

We have transitioned from broadcast-type media to what is referred to as intercast communication. Thus, we are dealing with the emergence of a new media perspective, in which the involvement of the existing media consumers in creating the message becomes standard practice. This is due to the fact that amateurs have an opportunity – if only in part – to take over the role of the hitherto monopolized media, which are usually guided solely by the espoused ideology or economic interests of the publisher. [...] What they find much more important is the possibility of presenting their views, the acceptance of the group, raising issues that are important for the author or the community with which they identify and – in effect – building a community (Jakubczak, 2022).

Moreover, Krzysztof Wasilewski argues that opinion leaders who engage in online media activity often do not see it as a profession but as an endeavor for the community (Wasilewski, 2022, p. 42).

However, Simon Order, who conducted studies with the staff at three non-commercial Australian radio stations broadcasting in Perth for his doctoral thesis, determined that, interestingly, radio volunteers seldom work for radio stations for purely altruistic reasons. The most commonly cited reason for engaging in such an activity was the desire for personal development and empowerment at a personal/group level. This was closely followed by other values oriented more towards societal gains, such as the connection between the media and local communities; community development and social outcomes; adherence to values typical of both professional and amateur journalism and media production values; internal democratization and transparent governance (Order, 2013, p. 199).

The aforementioned author sought to link the motivations with an elaborate system of values that are relevant in the context of community/citizen media and, more specifically, community radio.

Drawing on Order's research methodology, a decision was taken to examine whether similar values are invoked as incentives by the creators of online citizen media in Warmia and Mazury. Only minor adjustments were made to the classification provided by Order due to the different nature of the medium involved (radio vs the internet).



## Findings

The analysis shows that the values identified by Order do apply in the case of the surveyed creators of online citizen media and their motivations. Given the extent of the research material and the impossibility of categorizing individual statements with uniform precision (a number of which were ambiguous and could be assigned to multiple categories), the initial design to present a numerical summary of the analysis was abandoned. It became apparent that it involved too great a risk of not being able to obtain the same results with a different team of coders, which would call the scientific validity of the study into question. However, it is certainly possible to name three leading values that substantially bear on the decisions made by citizen media creators to contribute as journalists. In line with the typology formulated by Simon Order, these include:

- community development and social outcome;
- alternative dialogue, opinions, content;
- personal development and empowerment.

### Community Development and Social Outcome

Many of the interviewees mentioned that the desire to influence community development and achieve socially meaningful outcomes were important reasons why they engaged in media activities. One of the prominent goals was strengthening local identity, raising awareness of the region's history and creating a place where residents with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds could feel comfortable.

Jerzy Łapo's Facebook profile "Mazury według Jerzego – Archeologia, Historia, Etnografia" is a good example of such an activity:

The idea was to popularize such regional issues or domains that would give this cultural heritage a chance to be preserved and protected in the real world but also to treat this Masurian heritage, which in many cases is alien to the present-day inhabitants, even if not their own, to approach it with tolerance ("Mazury według Jerzego – Archeologia, Historia, Etnografia").

Piotr Karkoszka, author of the blog “Moja Warmia i Moje Mazury”, also draws attention to the need to raise awareness of the potential inherent in the region’s natural environment and the ways to protect it. According to Agata Grzegorzczak-Wosiek, who runs the blog “Przepisy ze Śpiewnika”, citizen media have a tremendous activating potential, encouraging people to explore both the history of the region and the most immediate history of one’s own family. Paweł Harajda, author of the Olsztyn-related newsletter, stresses that providing local information increases the level of involvement in local affairs.

An interesting group among the online citizen media in Warmia and Mazury comprises non-governmental organizations and associations whose chief goal is to deliver various pro-social undertakings. One such example is the YouTube channel of the Elbląg Association for Supporting Non-Governmental Initiatives (ESWIP). Tomasz Esden-Tempski from the Association of Feasible Initiatives “RzeczJasna TV” emphasizes the important role of the media in the process of social change, including the Association’s online television “RzeczJasna TV”. Television-mediated communication is also a vital tool in pursuing positive social change for the Foundation for Alternative Education “Ale”. Still, as the president of the foundation, Aleksandra Lemańska admits, the project was implemented with the young people in mind, and its originators were primarily interested in developing precisely that social group since it is often overlooked by the mainstream media.

Moreover, the creators of citizen media from Warmia and Mazury want to participate actively in the cultural life of the region. For Bernadetta Darska, the most important factor was the need to talk about literature and the opportunity to foster and shape literary tastes (“Nowości Książkowe – Blog Bernadetty Darskiej”). Creating and, to some degree, coordinating the cultural life of the region is also a major incentive for the creators of the Facebook group “Archipelagi Kultury Warmii i Mazur”.

What is more through education, efforts are also being made to help people in their everyday lives and change them for the better. This is the case with Weronika Dalgiewicz, who runs the account “Wjakweterynaria”. A similar motivation plays a prominent role in Julia Gadomska’s TikTok channel. Blogger Marcin Bobiński (“OlsztyńskieTramwaje.pl”) underlines

that the creators of citizen media also gain a real impact on what is happening in their local communities and seek to change their lives for the better. This particular aspect is highlighted as well by Małgorzata and Kamil Kowalewicz, who run the blog “RobiMy Podróże...”, or by Kinga Wiśniewska and Tomasz Esden-Tempski of “RzeczJasna TV” from Ostróda.

### **Alternative Dialogue, Opinions, Content**

When discussing their motivations, numerous creators referred to a certain gap in the media domain that they are trying to fill. This gap may involve broadly understood local content in general, as well as a specific thematic range, whether in the local or universal dimension. There is no shortage of authors who attempt to tackle the difficult questions concerning the identity of the region and their inhabitants. Such motivations are cited, e.g. by Rafał Karaś of the “Info Ełk” blog and Piotr Szatkowski, who runs the Facebook profile “Mazurskie Słódko na Dziś”. Masurian identity and history are also discussed by Przemysław Kawecki on his channel “Mazurskie Tajemnice” and Jerzy Łapo on the Facebook page “Mazury według Jerzego – Archeologia, Historia, Etnografia”.

Often enough, civic media creators focus on providing information which is important for the daily life of the region’s inhabitants, an area in which they perceive considerable shortcomings. Paweł Harajda, author of the newsletter “Olsztyn. W Skrócie”, tries to address that gap. This also applies to more specialized information that may be useful in everyday life, as is the case with Marcin Wójcik’s “Kulinarny Olsztyn”. Since content relating to various physical activities in the region is also lacking, Jakub Hajduk attempts to fill that niche through his blog “Jadenarowerze.pl”.

Another important aspect is who runs a given medium and whose point of view it presents, which, in the opinion of the creators, constitutes a problem they try to remedy. For instance, young people are a group whose point of view is underrepresented in the mainstream media despite their aspirations to have a voice on local issues. The podcast “Małomiasteczkowi”, hosted by female students from a secondary

school in Węgorzewo, does exactly that. Małgorzata and Kamil Kowalewicz, authors of the blog “RobiMy Podróże...”, discuss travelling from the perspective of persons with disabilities. Meanwhile, the Elbląg Association for Supporting Non-Governmental Initiatives uses its YouTube channel to publicize the undertakings of social activists affiliated with NGOs. The “NewsBar...” portal, on the other hand, presents the viewpoint of independent journalists.

Numerous projects take advantage of new media to deliver cultural content. One of the examples is Bernadetta Darska’s blog “Nowości Książkowe”, whose author noted certain deficits in how books are covered by literary scholars and decided to rectify the situation. Significantly, she has inspired the next generation of young researchers to undertake a similar activity. In fact, her doctoral student Hanna Łozowska, who is particularly interested in the literary and poetic developments in the Warmia and Mazury region, has run a book-related blog for several years now.

Even so, some of the interviewees brought up the fact that the thematic scope of information or the viewpoints of specific communities are not the only things at stake. The manner in which the content is presented is also somewhat deficient, which is an element they seek to address as well. For Kinga Wiśniewska and Tomasz Esden-Tempski from “RzeczJasna TV” this was a major reason why they engaged in media activity. Agata Grzegorzczyk-Wosiek, the author of “Przepisy ze Śpiewnika”, tries to talk about the often difficult history of the region from an unusual culinary perspective. In the blog “Olsztyn po Mojemu”, Grzegorz Komorowski takes a slightly tongue-in-cheek approach to the frequently serious subjects, creating photo-memes to comment on what is happening in Olsztyn and beyond. Jakub Hajduk, creator of the “Warmia Bike” podcast, emphasizes that not only the subject itself but also the form of conveying knowledge about bicycle tourism in the region – a podcast – has so far been absent from the media space.

## Personal Development and Empowerment

The analysis of the interviews shows that personal development has a major impact on the decision to undertake media activity, whereby it might mean broadening one's knowledge, skillset (whether journalistic or technical) and social competence. At the same time, engaging as a journalist positively affects participants' identities, enabling them to develop a sense of agency and thereby gain satisfaction.

An overview of the motivations included in this category should perhaps start with mentioning an essential value of self-development. When creating the medium, Weronika Dalgiewicz, author of "Wjakweterynaria" on Instagram, thought about self-actualization and overcoming her own barriers. A certain analogy can be seen in the statement by Professor Stanisław Czachorowski, creator of the blog "Profesorskie Gadanie":

For me – a lecturer – it's excellent training to put a short story, an entire story in a short speech, mostly written so that it has composition. [...] In my first year of secondary school, I was in danger of failing. I got an 'F' on my first dictation, which was due to dyslexia. It wasn't diagnosed at the time – the mistakes, etc. I was afraid to write to avoid errors. As a result, there were huge problems with written work, and with dictation, I had to be tutored. This is something I've probably been learning for 40 years or more. Every now and then, I either read books about how to make your speech work or took various courses, such as in storytelling ("Profesorskie Gadanie").

Many of the interviewed creators named the development of journalistic skills as an important benefit of their activity. This aspect was noted, e.g. by Szymon Żyliński, creator of "Vlog Wykładowcy". The possibility of improving one's skillset is also emphasized by Jarosław Kowalski, co-creator of the blog "Szalone Walizki". On the other hand, the author of "OlsztyńskieTramwaje.pl", Marcin Bobiński, admits that although he had sufficient journalistic and technical expertise when he started his online activity, he decided that it was worthwhile to gain further knowledge of the topics discussed on the blog.

Additional motivation may also stem from the desire for emancipation, which may entail shaping one's own identity, increased political awareness and influence on a personal and community level. Outlining

the circumstances surrounding the creation of the Facebook page and profile “Periodista Marta”, Marta Wiśniewska spoke of the right time to undertake this type of activity, namely “entering adulthood” and the need to define oneself.

Paweł Harajda, creator of the newsletter “Olsztyn. W Skrócie”, highlights the satisfaction with his work, not only in view of self-development opportunities but also in terms of reaching a professional and influential addressee. The author of YouTube’s “Rapnau”, Tomasz Loewnau, considers his medium to be a gateway to contributing to the public discourse. Much the same is the case with the blog run by Tomasz Białkowski, a well-known writer from Olsztyn. In the previously cited excerpt, Mateusz Kossakowski of “Głosy Warmii i Mazur” recognizes that bringing together people with similar values and lifestyles constitutes a value of his activity. Thanks to the portal, the community in question gains a voice that may play an important role.

The communal dimension is also interestingly exemplified in the activity of secondary school students, authors of the podcast “Małomiasteczkowi”. Passion, joy of creation and satisfaction are evident in their undertaking, translating into enhanced emancipation of both the creators themselves and their listeners – young people of Węgorzewo – who have an actual influence on how the podcast evolves.

A slightly different, more pragmatic approach to media activism is adopted by Witold Olbryś, who runs the Facebook profile “Powiat Szczycieński i Okolice – Historia, Zabytki i Archiwalia”. He lists specific benefits of online activity:

[...] one is meeting people I'd never have met any other way.... Well, maybe not all historians are on Facebook, but probably all regionalists surely are. And that's a positive thing after all, that you can get in touch with them. Also, I'm a collector first and foremost, so I also acquire new items for the collection thanks to Facebook. Sometimes, people let me know that they have something, whether to sell or to give it away. So that's the tangible thing which keeps me on Facebook (“Powiat Szczycieński i Okolice – Historia, Zabytki i Archiwalia”).

## Conclusions

It follows from the research that the citizen media creators in Warmia and Mazury are driven by a variety of motivations. In the examined set of 43 interviews, it was possible to identify all 27 motivations distinguished by the Australian researcher Simon Order. A significant proportion of those are altruistic and pro-social in nature, though personal motivations play an important role nonetheless.

The three core categories of values determined by Order came to the fore in the current study: community development and social outcomes, personal development and empowerment, as well as the desire to create an alternative to mainstream media in terms of dialogue, presented opinions and content.

Community development and anticipated outcomes encompass, among other things, an increase in historical and regional awareness, as well as improvement in many areas of life of the local residents: culture, communication, or access to goods and services. Many of the interviewed creators also invoked the need to activate local communities and recounted their achievements in this respect. According to the current study, motivation, which consists of the desire to create an alternative to the mainstream media with respect to dialogue, presented opinions and content – as formulated by Order – should be supplemented by a component relating to the form of such communication, which may deviate from the standard and constitute an alternative solution. The set of motivations pertaining to personal development and empowerment is also vital for the creators, as it is referred to in virtually each analyzed interview. Although the personal perspective predominates, the respondents frequently perceive themselves as either a member of a community or a kind of representative and motive force of the latter. Another interesting aspect is that they do recognize the need for self-improvement and further training and strive to be professional in their undertakings. Finally, one cannot fail to note the emancipatory and empowering value of the activities in which they engage. Creators of citizen media become important actors in the social and political domain, especially at the local level; they are representatives of a qualitative *vox populi* that must not be ignored.

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## Chapter 7

# Journalistic Ethics and Practical Problems in Creating Citizen Media

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### Introduction

**J**ournalistic ethics is an integral part of media ethics. By shaping views and evoking certain emotions, one sets a certain process in motion, a series of actions and reactions, the consequences of which may be far-reaching. In an interview, Ryszard Kapuściński (2003) asserted: “To do journalism, you have to be a good person first of all. Bad people cannot be good journalists. Only a good person tries to understand others, their intentions, their faith, their interests, their difficulties, their tragedies”.

Public expectations of the media tend to be high since, as conceptualized by Denis McQuail, the media should act for the good of the audiences that they serve; they should contribute to societal integration, speaking out in defence of those who have suffered harm, paying attention to social and ethnic minorities. When dealing with topics concerning war, security and terrorism, they should be particularly cautious, going so far as to self-restrict their own freedom of action; they should also comply with the social standards pertaining to morality and mores, e.g. by avoiding communications that may be scandalous or corrupting; they should also play an educational role and show the best in culture, promote originality and support cultural creativity; moreover, their task is to reflect the language and culture of the communities which they serve (McQuail, 1999, p. 33).

## Journalistic Ethics

Continuing uninterrupted for several decades, the debate on journalistic ethics has yielded a set of principles that most journalistic milieus now consider universal. They are stated in numerous codes of media ethics.

A number of applicable documents have also been developed in Poland, the most important of which is the Media Ethics Charter, signed in 1995 at the Journalist's House in Warsaw. It contains seven principles of conduct adopted by journalists, publishers, producers and broadcasters (Zakrzewski, 2001).

**The principle of truth:** journalists, publishers, producers and broadcasters shall make every effort to ensure that the information provided is truthful, conscientiously and without distortion, report the facts in their proper context, and promptly correct any erroneous information which has been disseminated.

**The principle of objectivity:** the author presents reality independently of their views, truthfully relaying various points of view.

**The principle of separating information from commentary:** any statement should enable the audience to distinguish facts from opinions and views.

**The principle of integrity:** acting in accordance with one's conscience and the good of the audience, non-susceptibility to influence, incorruptibility, and refusal to act contrary to one's convictions.

**The principle of respect and tolerance:** respecting human dignity and personal rights, especially privacy and reputation.

**The principle of prioritizing the good of the audience:** the fundamental rights of readers, viewers, and listeners take precedence over the interests of editors, journalists, publishers, producers and broadcasters.

**The principle of freedom and responsibility:** the freedom of the media entails responsibility for the content and form of communication as well as its consequences on the part of journalists, publishers, producers, and broadcasters (Media Ethics Council, 1995).

Citizen media, including those operating online, are often seen as a response to the processes of globalization and commercialization of the

mainstream media. However, it should be remembered that citizen journalists have the same rights and the same obligations, including the duty to adhere to professional ethics and exercise particular diligence and thoroughness when collecting and using press material (Sołowiej, 2021).

## Ethical Principles of the Online Citizen Media in Warmia and Mazury

The current study focused on examining which principles guide the creators of citizen media in their work and determine the extent to which they correspond with the set of generally accepted principles set out in the Media Ethics Charter.

Table 7.1. Ethical principles in citizen media

Ethical principles	Themes	Number of answers
Principle of truth	honesty, truthfulness	7
Principle of objectivity	objectivity, no ideologization of content	5
Principle of separating information from commentary	separating information from the commentary	3
Principle of integrity	integrity, avoiding deception, credibility, non-plagiarism, thoroughness, acting in line with conscience, respecting fair play and general principles of decency	14
Principle of respect and tolerance	causing no hurt, causing no damage, no hatred, not being offensive, being mindful of the other person, respect, tolerance, equality, taking care to comply with the law regarding copyrights, image, GDPR rules, good manners	19
Principle of prioritizing the good of the audience	avoidance of content that spreads hatred, goodness, pursuing a mission, publishing no “weird ads”, not advertising everything	6
Principle of freedom and responsibility	responsibility, freedom of speech, taking care of the quality of language, avoiding conspiracy theories, not sharing “nonsense”	13

Source: own research.

The research demonstrates that the creators of the online civic media in Warmia and Mazury often draw – more or less consciously – on the universal principles of journalistic ethics specified in the Media Ethics Charter.

## Problems Facing Citizen Media Creators

One of the important objectives of this research was to identify the problems which the creators of the online civic media of Warmia and Mazury confront. What problems have creators encountered when creating citizen media? Violations of ethical principles were mentioned by as many as 19 creators, often citing infringements of not one, but several principles. This category included statements which referred to disrespect, lack

Table 7.2. Difficulties in creating citizen media

Type of problem	Number of answers
Problems with ethics compliance among the users – hatred – hate speech – disrespect – racist, homophobic and xenophobic comments – lack of objectivity due to financial dependence – lack of responsibility – lack of concern for the quality of language – lack of cultivation – lack of tolerance – copyright violations – publishing unverified information	18
Problems relating to work organization: – time management – logistics – weather conditions – pandemic restrictions	16
Technical problems	11
Problems with financing one's activities	5
Personal issues – creative crisis – lack of appreciation for one's work – lack of suitable education	3
No difficulties	6

Source: own research.

of response from platforms to racist, homophobic and xenophobic comments, bias, paying little attention to the quality of language and other standards of good manners, tolerance, as well as copyright violations, use of hate speech, making life difficult for each other online, and disregard for the correctness of speech. Ethical problems also include insufficient research, which oversimplifies the message, and publishing unverified information (see Tab. 7.2).

The most serious problem reported by the majority of the surveyed creators is hate speech in a broad sense. Other issues, apart from those related to ethical infringements, concern time and work organization, i.e. logistical and time-related difficulties, technical problems, limited opportunities to finance their activities, and restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Six creators did not indicate any difficulties that their activities may involve.

## Conclusions

Creators of citizen media confront many of the same challenges, ethical dilemmas, and problems as professional journalists. The research shows that they are aware of the applicable rules and, although they are not usually professional journalists, they do try to follow the principles of truth, objectivity, separating information from commentary, integrity, respect and tolerance, the priority of the good of the audience and the principle of freedom and responsibility in the media they run. Still, the principle of respect and tolerance decidedly comes to the fore, manifesting in the statements by civic media creators which were linked to that tenet. They are indicative of the considerable care taken not to harm another human being, not to do damage through one's activities, as the creators avoid being offensive or using hate speech towards another person. Respect, tolerance, equality, consideration shown to others, compliance with the law with regard to image and reputation, adherence to the GDPR and good manners are exceptionally often called for by the interviewees.

Regrettably, the respondents also note that it is impossible for the listed ethical principles to be uniformly respected across the entire internet. For the creators of the online citizen media in the Warmia

and Mazury region, a breach of the fundamental ethical principles is the source of most problems. Issues such as hatred, hate speech, disrespect, the indifference of platform algorithms to racist, homophobic and xenophobic comments, and lack of objectivity, as well as disregard for language correctness and copyrights were raised in very many of the conducted interviews.

As the creators of civic media in Warmia and Mazury asserted in the current study, standards and regulations should apply in their case as well, while platform administrators should control the material uploaded to the servers.

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## **Annex**







## List of Conducted Interviews

Name of the medium	Name of the person(s)	Date
1	2	3
Archipelagi Kultury Warmii i Mazur	Urszula Kosińska	02.12.2022
Blog Autorski Tomasza Białkowskiego	Tomasz Białkowski	19.07.2022
Czarne Szkło	Paweł Ziółkowski	23.11.2022
Drony Warmińskie	Arkadiusz Stankiewicz	23.01.2023
Głosy Warmii i Mazur	Mateusz Kossakowski	27.12.2021
Halo Książki	Hanna Łozowska	21.12.2022
I Am Only Ania	Anna Tyszka	29.09.2022
Info Elk	Rafał Karaś	02.12.2022
Jadenarowerze.pl	Jakub Hajduk	18.11.2022
Klamka Zapadła	Jakub Kolberg Aleksander Chmarycz Maciej Sępiół	13.12.2022
Kulinary Olsztyn	Marcin Wójcik	05.10.2022
Lejdi Gada czyli Kobiety przy Mikrofonie	Karolina Rogóz-Namietko	21.10.2022
Małomiasteczkowi	Lena Melnyczok Marcjanna Rymaszewicz Natalia Stępniaik	02.12.2022
Mazurski Łącznik	Wojciech Łukowski	10.02.2023
Mazurskie Słódko na Dziś	Piotr Szatkowski	15.11.2022
Mazurskie Tajemnice	Przemysław Kawecki	04.08.2022
Mazury według Jerzego – Archeologia, Historia, Etnografia	Jerzy Łapo	20.09.2022
Met@phor_Games	Miłosz Babecki	10.11.2021
MFM TV	Aleksandra Lemańska	04.01.2023
Minimal Olsztyn	Tomasz Rusak	09.12.2022
Mityczna Stolica Mazur Elk/Lyck	Stefan Michał Marcinkiewicz	09.11.2022
Moja Warmia i Moje Mazury	Piotr Karkoszka	26.07.2022
NewsBar. Magazyn Opinii z Warmii i Mazur	Sławomir Ostrowski	01.07.2021
Nowości Książkowe – Blog Bernadetty Darskiej	Bernadetta Darska	03.12.2021
Olsztyn po Mojemu	Grzegorz Komorowski	26.09.2022

1	2	3
Olsztyn. W Skrócie	Paweł Harajda	09.12.2022
OlsztyniAnka	Anna Jeglińska	29.08.2022
OlsztyńskieTramwaje.pl	Marcin Bobiński	03.11.2022
Pani Etykieta	Julia Gadomska	02.02.2023
Periodista Marta	Marta Wiśniewska	29.11.2023
Powiat Szczycieński i Okolice – Historia, Zabytki i Archiwalia	Witold Olbryś	18.11.2022
Profesorskie Gadanie	Stanisław Czachorowski	09.09.2021
Przepisy ze Śpiewnika	Agata Grzegorzczuk-Wosiek	28.09.2022
Pstryk z Olsztyna	Marcin Kierul	27.09.2022
Rapnau	Tomasz Loewnau	02.12.2021
RobiMy Podróże. Na Dwoch Nogach i Czterech Kołach	Małgorzata Kowalewicz Kamil Kowalewicz	14.02.2023
RzeczJasna TV	Kinga Wiśniewska Tomasz Esden-Tempski	15.06.2021
Stowarzyszenie ESWIP	Sylvia Warzechowska, Arkadiusz Jachimowicz	14.09.2022
Szalone Walizki	Dorota Kowalska Jarosław Kowalski	09.07.2021
Vlog Wykładowcy	Szymon Żyliński	30.06.2021
Warmia Bike	Przemysław Lenart Jakub Hejduk	16.02.2023
Wjakweterynaria	Weronika Dankiewicz	02.02.2023
Wycieczki po Warmii i Innych Ziemiach Prusów i Krzyżaków	Tomasz Brzozowski	25.11.2022