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From Judym and Siłaczka (*Strongwoman*) to the Social Capital of Contemporary Poles

ABSTRACT: The subject of the undertaken analyses is to verify the thesis about the low social capital of Poles. Comparisons of data from national and international research undermine this thesis, indicating instead the specificity of the ways in which this capital manifests itself. They also prove that, when compared to other European nations, Poles rank among the group of societies relatively strongly involved in activities for the benefit of others. However, the potential for engagement seems to be dormant. In conclusion, the authors point to important tasks of social pedagogy to stimulate and support the development of this potential, indicating social and cultural animation as one of the measures.

KEYWORDS: social capital, Poles, charity work, social pedagogy, free time.

Introduction

One of the conditions for the development and efficient functioning of civil society, cooperation and participation of citizens in social life and, consequently, the development of the country itself is a high level of social capital. It is believed that this form of capital (in addition to human capital) is of particular importance in the development of entrepreneurship and the economy of the community. Many studies (e.g. Fukuyama, 1977; Czapiński, Panek, 2014, 2015; Trutkowski, Mandes, 2005) prove that a high level of social capital facilitates negotiations in the economic sphere, reduces operating costs or shortens investment processes. The attitude of trust between partners is

regarded as the source of these benefits in the first place. In addition to economic gains, a high level social capital is also believed to increase care for the common good, inter-group solidarity, and the creation of mechanisms of social control of power (Czapiński, Panek, 2014, p. 321).

In addition to supporting economic development, social capital is also assigned the role of a factor enabling to overcome the impasse caused by the contemporary socio-political conflict between the pursuit of maintaining and developing democracy and weakening democratic mechanisms for increasing economic efficiency by global processes initiated and strengthened by transnational corporations. The development of the social economy is indicated as one of the ways of resolving the social tensions resulting from this conflict. This postulate, however, can only be fulfilled if the social capital of a given community, trust level and voluntary activity of its members are strengthened (Ryfkin 2000 after Czapiński, Panek, 2014, p. 322).

In the context of the above, the opinions (often expressed in public forums by socially significant individuals) suggesting a generally low level of social capital and pro-social behavior of Poles are of concern. Therefore, it seems significant and important from the point of view of social practice to verify this thesis by referring to empirical data from surveys carried out on large samples, usually in the order of tens of thousands, conducted in Poland and other European countries by Statistics Poland and Eurostat.

Social surveys of Eurostat and Statistics Poland are carried out every several or more years. Their advantage is the comparability resulting from the jointly adopted surveying methodology and the size of the sample, usually in the order of several tens of thousands, which ensures the validity of the results. The statistical material referred to herein is the one most recently published by these institutions. The same is true of the surveys conducted by the Council for Social Monitoring [Polish name: Rada Monitoringu Społecznego] – those most recently conducted have been quoted. The information was presented at the plenary session of the Statistical Council at the end of January 2017 (<https://bip.stat.gov.pl/organizacja-statystyki-publicznej/rada-statystyki/posiedzenia-plenarne/posiedzenie-30012017>). In order to verify the surveys conducted by the Statistics Poland and Eurostat, the current results of the surveys carried out by CBOS have been quoted.

Social capital level in Poland compared to other European societies

The level of trust in other people is believed to be one of the most important indicators to measure social capital. The value of this indicator is

conditioned by many factors of a social nature, ranging from historical experience to the economic situation of a given community. The pan-European surveys conducted by the Council for Social Monitoring (Czapiński, Panek, 2014) show that it takes on quite different values in various European countries (Fig. 1).

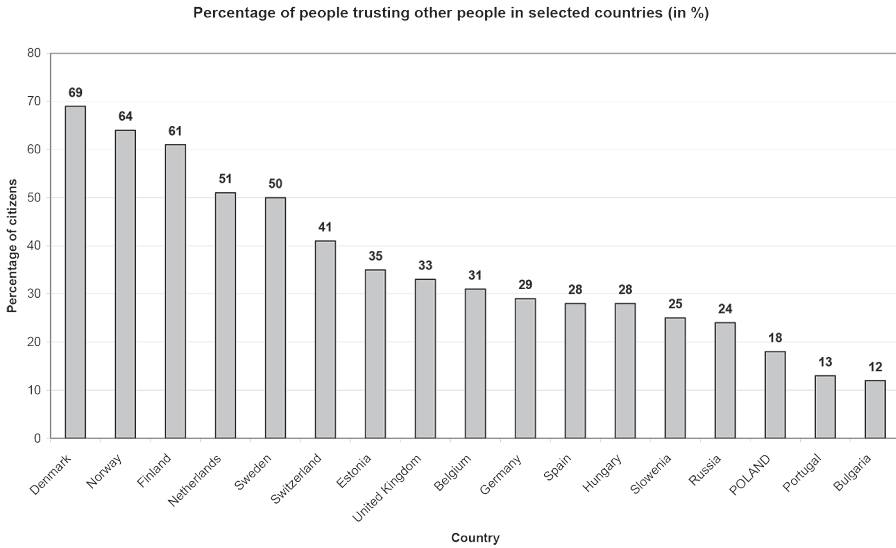


Fig. 1. Percentage of people aged 16 and over trusting other people
Source: Czapiński, Panek, 2014, p. 323

As can be seen in the figure above, the level of trust is the highest among Belgians, Norwegians or Dutch people, where the percentage of citizens trusting others ranges from 60 to almost 70 percent of the total population. The level of trust is a little lower among the Dutch and the Swedes, where every second person trusts other people. Citizens of Estonia, UK or Belgium are characterized by even lower trust level. In these countries, only every third person trusts others. The same level of trust is found in Germany, Spain and Hungary. The level of trust is even lower among Poles, Russians and Slovenians. Every fifth (or almost every fifth) inhabitant of these countries trusts others. The lowest level of trust – about 10 percent – is characteristic of Portuguese and Bulgarian citizens.

Other surveys give a similar picture. The measurement carried out at the level of a representative sample by CBOS gives the same conclusions. What is more, it turns out that the analyzed phenomenon has been on a similar level for over ten years. Only one in five of the surveyed Poles admits that one can trust the “other”, and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the population states that one must be

very careful when dealing with the “other” (*Zaufanie społeczne* [Eng.: Social Trust], 2020, p. 2)¹.

Another indicator of the level of social capital included in the presented surveys is the membership of citizens in social organizations providing assistance to others (Fig. 2).

Obviously, the indicator of citizens' activity within formalized institutions – NGOs – varied among the twenty countries surveyed. In the group surveyed we can distinguish three levels of activity. The first group of countries are those where citizens proved to be very active and belonged to two or more organizations. These were: Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark and Luxembourg. The lower activity – belonging to more than one organization – was shown by the citizens of: Belgium, Ireland, Finland, England, Germany, France, Israel. The activity in less than one organization was declared by residents of Slovenia, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece, Hungary and Poland.

As indicated by the data presented in the mentioned reports of the Council for Social Monitoring, Poles are in the last positions of the rankings of the quality of social capital, which may raise considerable concern. The above-mentioned measurements and rankings may, however, raise doubts as to their quality. They do not take into account the historical conditions in which the measured attitudes and behaviors were formed. Above all, they lack (except for Hungary) comparisons between Poles and members of societies with similar political and historical experience representing the post-communist countries of the so-called New Union. Taking into account this context, especially the trauma of political oppression and shortages under real socialism, would probably enrich the analyses undertaken, allowing for a better understanding of the conditions and directions of social capital development in Poland. Especially the lack of trust in the state and its institutions.

The importance of the mentioned historical conditions is emphasized by A. Podgórecki (1998), who indicated that the roots of social activity stem from the function and role of social elites. In Poland such a group was the intelligentsia, heir to and continuator of the nobility. Intelligentsia as a social group, or even a social class, was formed in parallel to the bourgeoisie in Western European countries. “One can think that this was the result of other social and economic relations prevailing on the Polish territory. The role of the nobility, and later its heirs – the intelligentsia – was the ethos of caring

¹ CBOS surveys not only reveal the general level of trust, but also draw attention to the importance of relationships and trust limited to a close circle, i.e. family or good friends. The more the social distance increases, the more the trust indicator decreases (*ibid.*, p. 8).

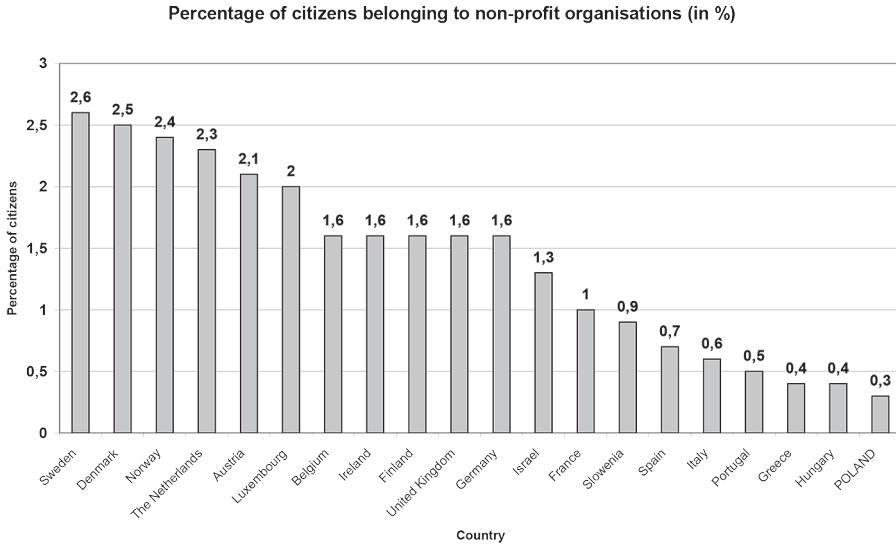


Fig. 2. Average number of organizations to which citizens aged 16 and over belong
 Source: Own elaboration based on: Czapiński, Panek, 2014, p. 324

for the subjects or later for the socially handicapped, which in later times was linked the ethos of the struggle for independence. In his essay entitled *Wolontariat* [English: Volunteer Work] (1998), he describes the phenomenon of intelligentsia, which was in fact characteristic only of Poland (and partly Russia). Each of these social groups (intelligentsia and bourgeoisie) had a different path and a different context of social formation, hence the paths to the goal were also different. Admittedly, after the experience of the *Solidarity* social movement, Polish Strongwoman and Polish Judym – without losing sight of the “ideals of missionary activity and action for the benefit of those in need” – should take organized, not dispersed activities (Podgórecki, 1998, p. 32), i.e. in formal organizations” (Orłowska, 2020, p. 117 et seq.).

The role of lifestyle in shaping pro-social behavior in Poland

Socio-cultural determinants, however, do not seem to be the only factors that are important for the formation of social capital of Poles. The second, no less significant one, are the current living conditions, in particular the possibilities and ways of time management. Activities developing social capital, such as social contacts, participation in the life of the local community, political participation or voluntary activity, are undertaken primarily in free time. They

therefore depend on the individual's time budget. This is determined by factors of a very diverse nature, such as the type of employment, economic status, level of education, family situation, place of residence, health condition, and finally the level and availability of services.

Interesting data showing the place of volunteer work in the structure of other Poles' behaviors are provided by the Statics Poland's surveys (2013). With the material collected in the course of those surveys, it is possible to determine in quite a detailed way the location of this type of activity in the time structure of daily activities of the subjects (Fig. 3).

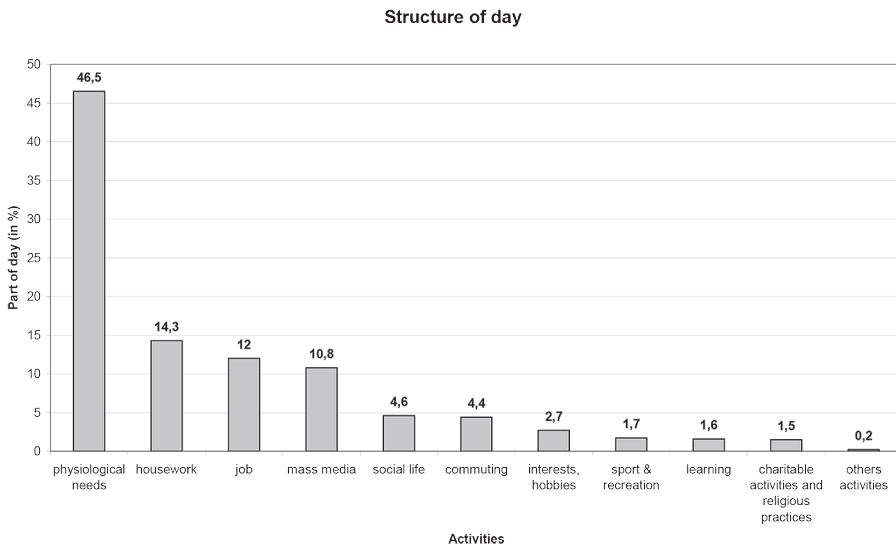
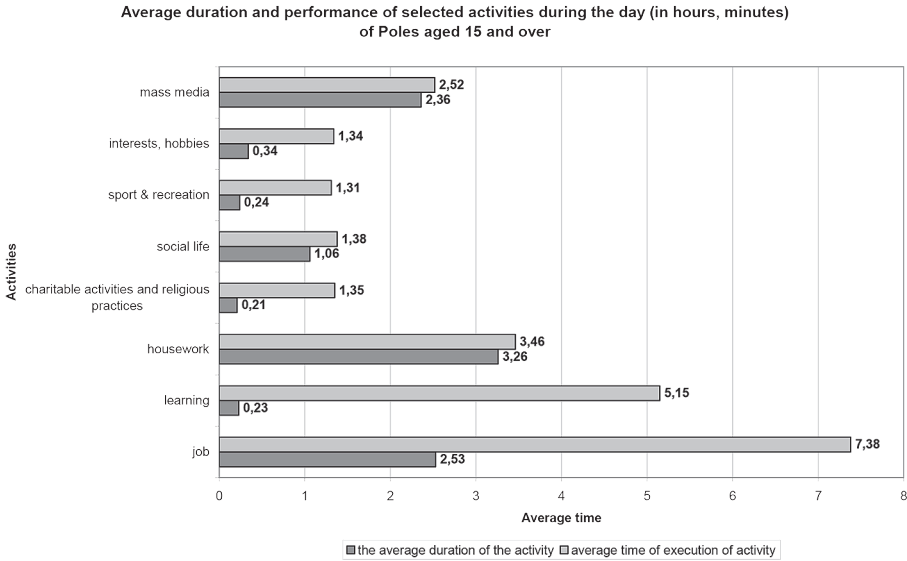


Fig. 3. Structure of the day of contemporary Poles according to the average duration in % (aged 15 and over)
Source: *Budżet czasu ludności* 2013. [Eng.: Population time budget 2013.] Part 1, (2015) Warszawa, GUS [Statistics Poland] p. 68

As can be seen in Fig. 3, the time devoted to selfless help to others in the Statistics Poland survey methodology is put together with religious practices. Such an approach probably stems from the period of the Polish People's Republic, where charitable activities were attributed only to the church and both activities – worship and charity – were in contradiction with the current doctrine. This resulted in restrictions limiting the possibilities of developing an important method of social work, i.e. organizing the local community.

However, the social, political and cultural changes taking place in Poland help to overcome, albeit unhurriedly, the negative influence of the past. Another analysis undertaken a few years later indicates that the involvement

of Poles in *pro bono* activities was growing, stronger than in previous years, fitting into the structure of everyday activities of Poles (Fig. 4).



Note: 1) the average duration applies to all Poles – i.e. the time spent on an activity, regardless of whether it is undertaken or not; 2) the average performance time concerns only those who undertake a given activity

Fig. 4. Average duration and performance of selected activities during the day in hours and minutes of contemporary Poles aged 15 and over

Source: Own elaboration based on: *Budżet czasu ludności* 2013. [Eng.: Population time budget 2013.] Part 1, 2015, Warszawa, GUS [Statistics Poland], p. 227 et seq.

As shown in Fig. 4, the activities during the day necessary to maintain existence are still dominant. The time necessary for sleep and regeneration, as well as for work or study take up most of the day, as before (see Fig. 3). However, the time devoted to helping others increases. Its share in time budget is still small – about 1.5% – almost half an hour a day together with religious practices. Nevertheless, this is already comparable to the time spent on learning or sport and recreation (based on *Budżet czasu...* Part 1, (2015), p. 227 et seq.). According to the above mentioned data, every fifth person in Poland (22.5%) is involved in such activities (including religious practices). Those who help others devote about 1.5 hours a day to this activity. In relation to all the Poles covered by the survey, it results 20 minutes a day spent on helping others (Fig. 4).

Averaged values mean, however, that apart from the people who are intensively involved in the work for the benefit of others, there are also people for whom this activity is alien. A more precise analysis of the involvement in helping others is presented in Table 1. It distinguishes three categories of information: the actual number of people engaging in social activities, the time they allocate to these activities and the time allocated by the so-called “statistical Pole” to help others.

Table 1. Structure of the day of contemporary Poles aged 15 and over by duration, time of performance and percentage of persons performing the activity (in %)

Type of activity	Average duration ¹⁾	Average performance time ²⁾	Percentage of persons performing the activity
Charity work and religious practices	0.21	1.35	22.50
– social work within an organization or institution	0.01	2.23	0.40
– informal help for other households	0.09	2.12	0.72
Participation in meetings of organizations, communities and informal groups including: religious practices and activities	0.11	1.09	16.40
	0.11	1.08	16.20

Note: 1) applies to all Poles – i.e. time spent on the activity, regardless of whether it is undertaken or not; 2) applies only to those who undertake given activity

Source: Own elaboration based on: *Budżet czasu ludności* 2013. [Eng.: Population time budget 2013.] Part 1, 2015, Warszawa, GUS [Statistics Poland], p. 227 et seq.

As it can be seen, the time spent on helping others is similar to the time spent on learning, sports and recreation (see Fig. 4). The data in Table 1, however, indicate that the Poles surveyed are much more willing to help individually than through institutions established for this purpose. The percentage of people working for others in the NGOs is relatively small. Much more people are involved in forms of direct help.

Analyzing the involvement of Poles in institutionalized activities, we find that most people participated in the work of religious organizations. Of all those undertaking institutionally mediated activity for the benefit of others, a quarter of the respondents was engaged in such in institutions of this category. About every six person chose activities in sports clubs and hobby clubs. More than one in ten were active in trade unions – nearly 12%, and almost every tenth were active in clubs and organizations of a social nature. Other activities were undertaken much less frequently (Czapiński, Panek, 2014, p. 325). We can therefore speak of a mixed model of activity of contemporary Poles. Some of them engage in helping others through their charitable activities or

trade union work. To what extent sports and hobbies, and even social life can contain elements of help activities for the benefit of others is, however, unknown.

The factors that significantly differentiate the involvement in the activities of various types of institutions that can create opportunities for helping others are gender, age, place of residence and level of education. The surveys conducted by the Council for Social Monitoring show that women tend to choose “soft” types of institutions, mainly focused on helping the weaker ones (such as charities) or linked to their other social roles (e.g. participation in parental committees). Men show other preferences, such as political parties, sports clubs, business organizations or trade unions (Czapiński, Panek, 2014, p. 325). The social activity of the respondents was also correlated with their age: it increased in the life phase of full-time professional activity to decrease in the post-working age (*Budżet czasu ludności...* 2015, p. 317). It increased with the size of the place of residence (*Budżet czasu ludności...* 2015, p. 278). Reverse correlations were observed with respect to the level of education. The degree of social involvement decreased as the level of education increased (*Budżet czasu ludności...* 2015, p. 246). This regularity contradicts the thesis that socially-oriented attitudes and sense of social responsibility grow along with the level of education. Nevertheless, it suggests an interesting research topic of the relationship between readiness to engage in activities for the benefit of others and the dimensions of individualism and collectivism, whose correlations with the level of education have been shown by the research of J. Koralewicz and M. Ziółkowski (2003) conducted at the beginning of the Polish transformation.

Readiness of Poles to help other people compared to other European societies

In an attempt to ultimately assess the level of social capital of Poles, referring to EUROSTAT data we would like to return to the issue of time spent on activities aimed at helping others. In this respect, Poles compare relatively favorably with representatives of other nations (Fig. 5).

Among selected European countries, Poland (as well as Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, Spain, England and Germany) belongs to the group with relatively high time commitment to helping others. Italians and French are more committed than Poles. In many European societies it is, however, lower than in Poland (Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Latvia and Hungary).

In the light of the aforementioned surveys, Poles, as well as Lithuanians, Latvians, Swedes, Estonians, Norwegians, French and Englishmen, are also

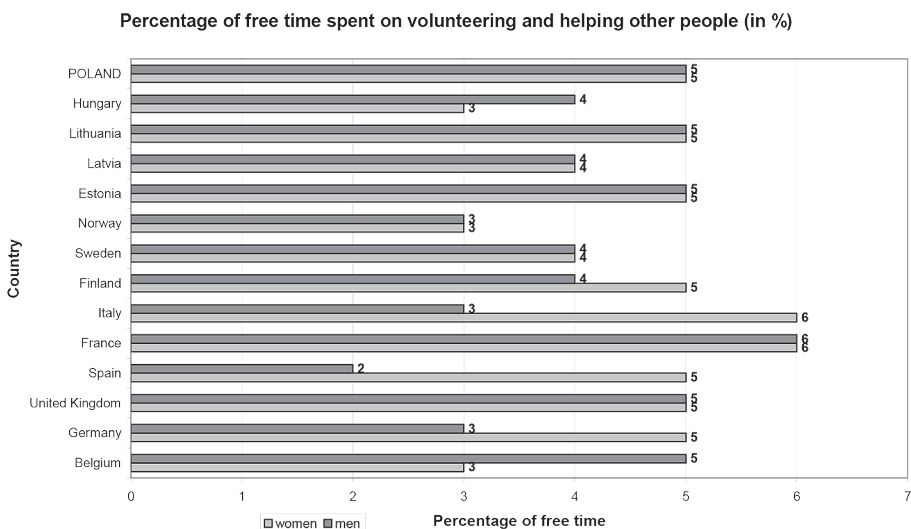


Fig. 5. Amount of time spent on volunteer work and helping others in selected EU countries in % of free time budget

Source: Orłowska, 2007, pp. 79–80.

characterized by a similar level of male and female involvement in helping others². The level of activity of Poles, measured by the amount of time devoted to helping others by representatives of both genders, is at an average level – 5% of free time.

Conclusions

In public debates on social capital, it is not always clear that there are two different conceptual approaches. One of these describes social capital as belonging to a certain social group (Putnam, Fukujama, Coleman). The other sees it as an attribute of a given individual (Bourdieu). Both intellectual trends undertake analyses of social functioning of an individual and his or her well-being. In R. Putnam’s concepts (2008), well-being is achieved by creating norms and values common to all members of the group and enable them to cooperate and work together for the common good. P. Bourdieu’s concept (1993), which sees social capital as an individual good derived from

² In some countries, such as Italy and Spain, such activities are dominated by women. Only in Hungary the situation is the opposite – men are more active.

the individual's social networks, focuses on the importance of this capital for the achievement of individual benefits.

In social practice we most often encounter an approach inspired by the achievements of the former. Social capital is therefore seen as “social networks governed by moral norms or customs [...] which bind the individual to society in such a way as to enable him or her to cooperate with others for the common good” (Czapiński, Panek, 2014, p. 322). The indicators of social capital are social trust, voluntary membership and performing functions in social or local government organizations, participation in public life through participation in meetings, voluntary activities for the benefit of the local community, and especially unpaid work for others (Czapiński, Panek, 2014, p. 322).

The material presented in this paper, although from a few years ago, allows us to reflect on the social capital of Poles compared to representatives of other nations. From the analyses presented, a rather optimistic picture emerges, contradicting the opinions expressing concern about the alleged lack or abnormally low level of social capital of Poles. The data mentioned above indicate a certain specificity of Poles in comparison with representatives of other nations, namely:

- a specific feature of helping “others” characteristic of contemporary Poles is its individual, not institutional, nature. This probably results from historical experience and a model of help based on cultural patterns referring to the ethos of the nobility and the intelligentsia as protective social strata. (This aspect of helpfulness (subsidiarity), represented mainly by the literary figures of doctor Judym and Strongwoman, was pointed out by A. Podgórecki in his essay *Wolontariat* [Eng.: Volunteer Work] (1998);
- regardless of the form of help (individual or institutional), every fifth Pole on average is involved in help activities. Help given to the “other” is provided at a similar level of commitment, independent of form. Those who have engaged in such activity are consistent in continuing it;
- the social situation of respondents has a significant impact on the way and type of help they provide. These are: age, gender level of education and place of residence. A certain Polish specificity is the differentiation of helping others resulting from the level of education, when people of high status are oriented towards institutional help rather than individual actions. The gender activity profile is also different;
- the presented data also contradict the thesis of low involvement in socially-oriented activities of contemporary Poles, as they belong to the group of societies with rather high time commitment.

Summing up, it should be stated that the analysis allows us to outline a certain area of activities relevant to the needs of Polish society entering post-modernity. These needs are determined both by changes in consciousness, primarily by the growing importance of social participation and subject – and citizenship-related orientation of the young generation of Poles, and by the living conditions of 21st-century Poles. Primarily by the growing migration processes, the high workload, the development of an atomized society or the trauma resulting from the COVID-19 epidemic and the overlapping economic and political crises. These events confirm the thesis of the dormant social capital of Poles, based on the presented data, revealing the enormous potential reflected in, among other things, increase in cooperative and help-oriented behaviors, grassroots self-organization or spontaneous involvement in the activities undertaken by other people. They, however, raise the question whether, and if so, how and by what means, to transform what is individual, situational and potential into what would have a permanent and collective value.

This is a question concerning social pedagogy and its role in supporting the development of social forces. “They are awakened, triggered, stimulated in small, informal social groups, which are formed in macro and micro formal communities. The initiative of activating human resources is based on the possibilities contained in the assumed and not assumed tasks of the institutions, which guarantee such possibilities of their development, functioning and effectiveness. Individual forces are revealed and stimulated in the course of revealing and developing collective forces. The institutionalization of social life makes individual forces grow with the development of collective forces, while they disappear, decline when social movements, institutions become pathologized or their proper functioning is inhibited.” (Lepalczyk, 1995, p. 26). “Social capital plays special role in the construction of the social environment – the foundation and basic area of activity for social pedagogy (Marzec-Holka, 2009, p. 93). Its quality determines the level of social participation, especially at the level of education (Marzec-Holka, 2009, p. 96), which is the foundation for change and for exiting the vicious circle of social exclusion.” Orłowska, 2020, p. 117 et seq.).

The area of awakening, shaping and supporting the development of social capital is practically every area of the activity of Poles. In addition to help-oriented activities and the work of NGOs, also the activities undertaken within the framework of socio-cultural animation projects should be regarded as particularly significant, especially at the local community level. Their references to universal, unifying and crossing borders of diverse ethnicities, worldviews,

gender, age, social status and political views, cultural values, attractiveness and power of liberating human activity and subjectivity predispose these projects to serve as basic forms of social activity (Bleszyńska, 2009, 2016)

Note

The article is a part and continuation of the discourse on building social capital held at J.A. Komensky University Prague – M. Orłowska (2020).

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