

MATEUSZ SZAST\*

## Implications of an Individual's Participation in Religious Organisations – Case Study

### Abstract

The article addresses the issue of the social implications of participating in religious groups, with particular emphasis on shaping the type of social capital among members of the mentioned religious groups or any group of a religious nature. It is not sufficiently represented in research work on modern sociology, especially the sociology of religious and modern lives, considering the context of the functioning of a modern man in their interpersonal space. To this end, qualitative research was carried out involving individual case studies. Various qualitative techniques were used: interviews, an analysis of document contents, photographs, biographies, observing participants in their social activities, trust, social ties (among members of the mentioned groups), the social roles of members, the implementation of social functions, participation in the common good, and the values and norms of social coexistence that guide the studied person. These imply the emergence of negative social capital, closing social capital, amoral familism and strong bonds in the norms developed by the group to which the analysed case belongs.

### Keywords:

case study, social capital, participation, social ties, religious groups

---

\* Institute of Sociology, University of the National Education Commission in Krakow, Poland, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5677-6471>, e-mail: [mateusz.szast@up.krakow.pl](mailto:mateusz.szast@up.krakow.pl).

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The problem of an individual's participation in religious organisations addressed in this paper is an interesting phenomenon for the researcher of social phenomena. However, it is as well disturbing, as it concerns intimate, sensitive and private data, both from a social and personal point of view. The aim of this paper is not so much to show the individual in the context of his or her functioning within religious groups, the legitimacy of such organisations or the realisation of their statutory aims, but at the same time to present the type of social bonds created within them, with particular emphasis on the social implications of these bonds for the individual involved in these relations. Thus, this project aims to gain knowledge allowing us to grasp the degree to which the surveyed person is rooted in religious groups or groups of a religious nature, the strength of the social and emotional bonds connecting him/her with other participants in religious life, as well as to assess the process of his/her socio-cultural adaptation (achieved professional and material status, quality of life, level of social participation, etc.). The assessment of the social implications of participation in religious groups can provide insight into whether the audited entity treats his or her involvement in religious groups as a temporary state, understood in terms of a survival strategy although not promising opportunities for life advancement, or conversely as the realisation of a long-range strategy of self-development based on the realisation of values, norms and principles of faith. Thus, the research focuses on the sociological characteristics of individuals under examination, providing valuable insights into religiousness, social capital, and the functioning of religious groups.

## **2. CONCEPTUALISATION – THE SOCIAL CAPITAL APPROACH**

The study of socio-cultural capital and its formation within the groups of a community character and the analysis of the effects of these relations on the members (member) of the group is important for broadening research issues, especially sociological ones. The research concept considers different authors' approaches to understanding social capital. However, it was developed mainly based on the social capital theory of Pierre Bourdieu, James S. Coleman and Robert D. Putnam. In addition, the author employs the assumptions of network theory. Social capital, following P. Bourdieu, is treated primarily in the individual dimension, as a resource of particular individuals (analysed unit), not of communities. It is the sum of actual and potential resources which an individual may possess as a result of par-

participation in a network of relations, acquaintances, and recognition, and its essence is the potential for interaction (e.g., it may concern interaction with two systems of reference – a religious group as a group of reference for the case study, and the Polish community in the broadest sense (as a set of values). Through interacting in networks of informal social ties, the participant of religious groups increases his chances of achieving the expected goals (e.g., increasing his professional position, and personal or economic status). From the theory of P. Bourdieu (1986), the author also draws the concept of cultural capital, which includes knowledge, skills, cultural competencies, orientation in behaviour, social relations, etc. „Social capital is a set of actual and potential resources that are related to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships based on mutual knowledge and recognition, i.e., group membership. The stock of social capital possessed by an individual depends on the size of the network of connections he or she is able to effectively mobilise as well as on the stock of capital (economic, cultural and symbolic) possessed on his or her own account by each of those with whom he or she is associated”.

In this paper, R. D. Putnam’s issue of social involvement as a basis for forming social networks will be relevant. In addition, J. S. Coleman (1988) draws attention to the development of social capital due to the interaction of individuals, the intensity of social contacts and the maintenance of networks of social relations. Putnam’s theory „refers [...] social capital to such features of the organisation of society as trust, social norms and networks of association that can enhance the efficiency of local and regional community. The rule of generalised reciprocity is particularly important among the social norms governing interactions between individuals. It contributes to strengthening mutual trust, which is an essential element of social capital. Another form of social capital is civic engagement networks, horizontal structures of social organisation, frequently created to solve public problems. They are characterised by voluntary commitment to the common good, a high level of activity, a tendency to cooperate and to build mutual trust, which is an essential element of social capital” (Putnam, 1995). In Putnam’s initial formulation, social capital „refers to the connections between individuals – social networks and norms of reciprocity and the trust that grows out of them” and can simultaneously be a „private good”, i.e., a specific resource of the individual allowing him to pursue his own interests, and a „public good”, affecting the effectiveness of the whole community. R. D. Putnam’s contribution is to distinguish two types of this capital (Ziółkowski, 2012). The first one is bonding capital (bonding), in Poland, also translated as „integrative”, i.e., exclusive, strengthening small groups that oppose other groups, thus generating intergroup antagonisms. It is, as Putnam writes,

a social „super glue”. The second is bridging capital (*bridging*), occasionally translated as „bridging” or inclusive capital, which creates bonds between different groups and their members. It is, in turn, a social „superspread” (Zarycki, 2008).

James S. Coleman (1988) believed that social capital is the relationships between individuals that become an important community resource. Similarly to physical capital, human capital, i.e. labour resources, creates potential for social development. According to the researcher, social capital includes trust and norms and bonds between people that improve their actions, thus facilitating the creation of a social community.

It remains important to reveal the essence of the types of social capital proposed by R. D. Putnam with a special focus on binding type social capital. Binding capital refers to being rooted in the lowest level social structures, from the family level, through friendship relations to the small local community. They are characterised by the fact that all community members are familiar with each other personally, and their mutual trust is based on close social ties, frequently of the nature of blood ties or professed values and norms. Bridging capital refers to trust and the ability to cooperate with people we do not know personally, whom we do not have direct contact with.

### **3. OPERATIONALISATION – THE MAIN ASSUMPTIONS OF THE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS**

While designing the research that became the basis for this analysis, the author observed participant for several months in one of Krakow’s religious groups, which was incidentally linked to other religious groups (Ziemiński, 1994). The observation was remarkable (both overt and covert). However, the most successful was the case study, a participant in several religious groups operating in Kraków. It sheds new light on the bonds created by individuals entangled in religious groups. The word „groups” is used here on purpose, because the character of the groups’ activity merely has the attribute of religiosity in its name since a real religious formation in the spirit of Catholicism and spreading faith can hardly be found in their activity. Furthermore, the aim of this article is not to analyse the functioning of religious groups, their evaluation, or to check the legitimacy of their statutory (fundamental) aims but to analyse one concrete case of the formation of an individual’s life in the face of his or her participation in various religious groups.

According to Marcin Lisak (2015, p. 32), current Polish citizens profess belief in God but are increasingly detached from the institutional Church. This pheno-

menon, known as de-churching, individualisation, and selectivity in religiousness, has been rapidly growing since 2005, as consistently indicated by CBOS research. The findings show that in the second decade of the 21st century, over half of the respondents declared a customised or à la carte faith. The period between 2010 and 2012 is particularly noteworthy, as CBOS surveys began to reveal the prevailing sentiment of “I believe, but in my own way” (Lisak, 2015, p. 46). Marta Bożewicz’s (2022) report on the changes in the religiousness of Poles during and after the pandemic provides further evidence. In 2022, fewer Polish people attended church services compared to 2018. The report indicates that the largest group, comprising nearly one-third of the subjects (32%), attended liturgy most frequently on Sundays, once a week. In contrast, the percentage of people attending church or religious ceremonies weekly dropped from 45% in 2018 to its current level. Furthermore, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of individuals attending liturgy less frequently or completely abstaining from participation. Before the pandemic, in 2018, this fraction accounted for 9% and 10%, whereas in 2022, it rose to 15% of the individuals who stated that they attend religious ceremonies with a decreasing frequency or stopped attending church altogether. A mere 1% of Polish people have regularly attended daily masses, liturgies, and similar events since 2019.

**Table 1.** Frequency of Polish people attending services, masses, or religious meetings from 2018 to 2022

Frequency	Mar 2018	Jan 2020	Jan 2022
<b>Daily</b>	0%	1%	1%
<b>More than once a week</b>	4%	4%	4%
<b>Every Sunday</b>	45%	41%	32%
<b>More or less once a month</b>	17%	18%	18%
<b>On Christmas and/or Easter</b>	13%	11%	13%
<b>Less frequently</b>	9%	11%	15%
<b>Never</b>	10%	11%	15%
<b>No answer/Hard to say</b>	2%	3%	3%

Source: Bożewicz, 2022, p. 2.

Religious websites play a significant role in forming religious groups, highlighting the Church’s embrace of new technologies and its efforts to adapt them to achieve its core objectives. Since 2016, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of religious websites, particularly in the first half of 2016, specifically in April and May. During this period, the number of users and the reach of these

websites reached almost 5,721k (22.19%) and over 5,482k (21.73%), respectively. A year later, in the same months, the figures were as follows: April – over 4.2m8 (15.19%) and May – over 3.6m9 (13.24%) (Stachowska, 2017, p. 45).

Rafał Boguszewski (2015, p. 26) analysed numerous studies on the religiousness of Poles. He raises an important question: “How do Polish individuals reconcile the cognitive dissonance associated with identifying themselves as believers while simultaneously rejecting at least some of the official moral principles of Catholicism?” The findings reveal that individuals are increasingly aware of these discrepancies and accept them. In their pursuit of consistency, they are more likely to present their religiousness as individualised. Currently, over half of the adult Poles (52%) identify as believers in their own unique way, while just under two-thirds (39%) believe in and adhere to the teachings of the Church.

An individual's attitude towards a religious group undergoes three distinct stages. The first stage involves the individual joining the group, which is characterised by feelings of uncertainty and ambivalence. In the second phase, known as the confrontation stage, the initial period of politeness and subordination gives way to questioning one's own position within the group and identifying who holds the most significant role. This phase of confrontation can be succinctly described as a time of testing the group (Boguszewski, 2015, p. 26). Finally, the last stage in the individual's engagement with a religious group is marked by forming a community and developing a sense of belonging (Borkowski, 2013, p. 126).

A case study is a research strategy that focuses on understanding the dynamics of a single system “ a case. According to Antoni Kożuch (2014) and Izabela Marzec, “case studies are characterised by insightful thinking and appropriate preparation of evidence – such that it leads to the right conclusions and meticulous and reliable consideration of alternative explanations”. *Case study* is a method used in qualitative research. As Agata Górny (1998) notes, “when deciding on this method, one must reckon with the fact that it does not entitle one to generalise the obtained results beyond the particular case studied”. In the words of Krzysztof Konecki: „a case study is not a methodological choice, it is instead a choice of the object of study. A case can be practically anything, but the choice of a case is the most difficult moment of research” (Mizerek, 2017). In the present research, an instrumental case study was applied to study a specific case to understand a phenomenon more precisely or to confirm a theory (of strong social ties and social capital of the binding type). For this purpose, it became significant to place the case under study in a specific context (the context of participation in religious groups) to understand its connections (links) with the social environment and the religious community. The first step was to raise the research inquiry: does participation in

religious groups condition the presence of *binding capital* and the closure of the individual to the broader community? The aim of the study is thus to search for an answer to the issue: do the ties that bind individuals active in religious groups have a significant impact on their private lives and their social life shaped within these groups? A case can be virtually anything, although case selection is the most difficult part of the research (Mizerek, 2017).

The situation of a woman, 42 years old, unmarried, financially independent, working in a private company with average earnings above the national average at the time of the study (5300 PLN gross), living in Kraków since 2000, to which she came in order to pursue higher education at one of Kraków's universities, to stay in the city permanently after graduation, was analysed. The research material consisted of her biography, numerous interviews regarding her life, her participation in religious groups, her family status and the participation in religious groups of people from her family environment. To recount the course of this study, i.e., the unit of observation, is to systematically indicate what issues were raised in the research material, thus the collection of analysed contents (interview texts and observation notes), which were additionally supplemented with reflections and remarks that seem relevant for interpretation. The technical aspect of this analysis was to generate a categorisation key, which in the case of qualitative research, is capable of even constituting the study's outcome (Szczepaniak, 2012). An inductive approach was employed, where recent categories were added to the key during the research work, followed by repeated analysis of the collected research material. Therefore, each key category had an appropriate comment (defining what enters a specified category with a comment). Furthermore, it seems justified to create tables with quotations. However, for this text, due to the limitations of the volume of the text, the table was abandoned, and some quotations were included in the text.

The criterion for interpreting the conclusions was to categorise (block) the answers within the following themes (key categories):

- a) issues of religiosity of the case study with particular reference to her biography and family (parents and siblings);
- b) participation in religious groups (since when does she belong, to which and how many religious groups, how often does she participate in group meetings, motives for participation);
- c) values professed by the research participant (faith, family, health, friendship, self-realisation, materialism);
- d) norms that the research participant follows in her life as a manifestation of compliance with general social rules;

- e) social capital generated within religious groups (intragroup values, trust, time spent in and with groups, ways of spending leisure time);
- f) participation in the broader civil society (participation in NGOs, volunteering, helping others – selflessly, observing the rules of social coexistence and caring for the common good).

The research was conducted from November 1, 2020 to April 10, 2021, generating substantial documentation in the form of interviews, transcripts, notes, recorded conversations, biographical analysis, and photographic documentation of the research participant. In addition, the author employed the relational method of conducting interviews based on coaching, which was innovative in his opinion; the participant answered the questions posed by the researcher freely and without undue pressure while undertaking an in-depth analysis of her personal, family, social and professional situation in the context of her participation in religious groups.

#### **4. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF RELATIONSHIPS BASED ON STRONG TIES OF MEMBERS OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS**

Several observations were made based on the collected statements, interviews, observations, and analysis of the content provided by the respondent.

1. The case study shows that the examined woman, due to her background and the patterns internalised through primary socialisation (parents who are believers, practising regularly with a tendency to above-average participation in religious services, pilgrimages, sacraments) and secondary socialisation (secondary school run by a religious congregation), has a positive attitude towards religious groups, as well as religious groups associated with a charisma within the confines of the professed faith, intragroup values, rules and norms of their functioning. It is manifested, for instance, by trusting these groups and committing her free time to them. At the time of observation, the respondent was active in three religious groups in Kraków. Previously, she had participated in other groups but had given them up for various reasons: „did not like it, did not like the charisma, people were strange”. She builds her friendship relations mainly based on belonging to religious groups (reference groups), which manifests itself, for example, by describing members of religious groups as: „friends”, people who are „close”, surrounding with support or „good people”, people who are „in love”, and colleagues or colleagues from work, school simply as acquaintances and insignificant people. Spending practically all of one's free time on meetings with members of these groups, telephone conversations, and



intensive online contact (groups form email subscriptions, subgroups in popular instant messaging services, e.g., Messenger, Zoom, chat rooms) was connected with limiting participation in the broader national or Kraków community (lack of involvement in NGOs, considering it unnecessary, lack of voluntary activity, despite the desire and internal need). The examined case of a person indicates a „split”, as he/she cannot make an effort to get involved – lack of courage, strength, and conviction for participating in foreign groups. An aspect supporting participation in civil society and caring for the common good is participation in elections – the surveyed person took part in general elections (presidential, but not always local government), guided by the determinants of the preferred values, e.g., the election of Andrzej Duda representing the shared views.

2. In her actions, the person surveyed is guided by the norms of social coexistence focused on the principles of respecting the law (in general). However, in the case of religious groups, some shortcomings were noticed, e.g., while performing his duties, he often corresponds on the Internet channels with members of religious groups. The exclusion of correspondence with people from outside religious groups may indicate strong ties between the respondent and members of these groups almost exclusively. When asked about the possibility of breaking the law for the common good and local patriotism (speeding, paying taxes in Poland, supporting domestic producers, Polish industry), the person analysed was ambivalent, considering it unnecessary. Moreover, inaccuracies were present in answers concerning the realisation of everyday matters, and information about members of groups she meets. Moreover, the respondent used confabulation towards the researcher regarding the information about the groups she participates in (concealing facts about the composition of the groups, members' personalities, strengths, and weaknesses). The researcher himself verified the information on this particular issue. As a result of a deeper analysis, it turned out that in these groups participate people who do not adhere to similar values and norms of behaviour. However above all, have similar life experiences (childhood traumas, failure to implement one's own life strategy, loneliness, seeking acceptance of one's faults, imperfections or preferences).

3. The analysed person builds its relations based on trust in persons displaying similar values (family issues, religiosity, faith, institutional Church, shared views on the world), strong relations and dense networks (various indirect communication channels) and limited trust in persons outside these groups and contact with them. It seems interesting to note the number of friends of the analysed case from outside religious groups – there are practically none, and collegial relations are weak ties and little contact. The respondent explains this fact by the lack of free time to

maintain contact. Nevertheless, the question arises: where would the contacts with other colleagues come from, since she spends all her free time with individuals gathered around religious groups, e.g., in the morning after work, at 5 p.m. she goes to the church, where she spends her free time. After work, around 5 p.m., she does not go home but to meetings, adoration, „talks”, and outings with religious groups; she arrives home late (7-9 p.m. depending on the time of year), which is not conducive to building a family environment or lasting family relationships.

4. In the context of free time, one notices a focus on aspects of religiosity – various adorations, retreats, days of recollection, trips to religious places (Częstochowa once a month, days of recollection several times a year, retreats twice a year and frequent pilgrimages). The respondent spent her holiday in 2020 on a travelling pilgrimage to Scandinavian countries. She travelled on the mentioned trips (several days, weekends) not individually, but in groups, even holidays. She spends in groups of friends focused on her values. More to the point, once asked about her hobbies or interests, the respondent evaded answering, which the researcher had to enforce with general questions. It was noticed that this person does not have any fixed hobbies or interests – if the group or someone from the group goes skiing, they go skiing with them; if they go cycling – they go cycling too; if they go to the mountains – they go together. No activity would give her pleasure, provide a break from everyday life, or satisfy her elementary needs for self-fulfilment. When asked how she spends her free time and what she likes to do, she said she likes meeting people and praying. Apart from that, she cannot make decisions on her own (individually) and consults her mother or friends from those very groups and clergymen (confessor, spiritual director) about even easy, seemingly trivial issues. However, there is a lack of consistency in this area – when the researcher asked about the types of prayers, the way of praying them, and participation in masses or services, it turned out that the surveyed person practices and prefers only the prayers recommended in the group to which she currently belongs. She is not fond of the Rosary or the Litany of Loreto, but she goes to the entrustment to Our Lady of Częstochowa. Moreover, she possesses a kneeler in her flat and many prayer books and spends much of her day praying and contemplating. She believes that she is a merciful person and spreads mercy. However, she does not feel obliged to help civil society, does not participate in costs (contributions and donations to the institutional Church are limited and meagre), does not support NGOs, which is manifested, for instance, by her dislike for the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity and other social campaigns. She prefers „Szlachetna Paczka”, Caritas and organisations *strictly* ecclesial.

5. Family relations are atrophic, which the respondent explains by the lack of communication with her parents or sister. While exploring this theme, it was discovered that she considers her mother to be „too interfering and controlling”, while she considers her father „a sick man and a freak”. In addition, relationships with friends and acquaintances are formed within mainly religious groups (the exception is the acquaintance of two women named Catherine and Agnes, who used to work with the respondent, one at school and the other in a corporation). An interesting element projecting relations with acquaintances and friends became the respondent’s birthday. She invited her friends and acquaintances from religious groups as her relatives, without including her family, to her celebration and booked a hall for many people. The gathering did not occur due to a limited budget. However, she organised a birthday gathering in a private flat to which she invited several friends, only two of whom were outside the religious groups. It is significant that she initially did not invite her parents, siblings or boyfriend (*incidentally*, she attended her boyfriend’s family celebrations and spent much time at his family home), considering that she „did not feel obliged”. The situation from the research point of view is clear and needs no comment. Another issue in the context of emotional relations was the analysis of situations in which the researcher quarrelled with her partners – the aim was to learn the reasons for the disputes and the ways of solving them. It turned out that quarrels were not frequent but focused around special dates: Men’s Day, Women’s Day, Valentine’s Day, boyfriend’s name day, Saint Nicholas’ Day. The woman was then invited to various religious events or meetings organised by groups or members of those groups. It turned out that as long as the religious groups and their members were not familiar that the respondent was dating her partner, their relationship was developing, still after forcing the information about the fact of being in a relationship (less time for friends, less participation in meetings, joint trips, lack of desire to participate in group meetings), which was connected with situations of conflict between the values of the respondent and the groups to which she belonged, she had to choose whom to spend time with.

6. The situation of emotional relationships of the forty-year-old woman is complicated because she has not arranged her emotional life. She has not been in a stable relationship for over a year. She believes that she is looking for, and makes efforts to find a „worthy” candidate for her husband, still these efforts are fruitless since in her adult history, she has had two partners, dating one for six months, the other for eight months, both relationships ended in failure and, in the opinion of the respondent, broken hearts. The discrepancies in professed values, the realisation of norms resulting from faith and religiosity, and one’s own

behaviour seem interesting at this point, as the respondent was abandoned due to egocentrism and selfishness, as well as focusing on friends and relatives from religious groups in which she participates. In addition, there was a discrepancy between the declared values and norms and their observance, as, despite her religious fervour, the respondent preferred premarital intercourse, sexual play, self-gratification, and practices such as *speed dating* or having several accounts on dating sites. The respondent, what was apparent from the observation and analysis of the interviews, also did not pay attention to the issue of the sensitivity of the partners she met, as she defined „her beauty as well as personal charm”. She met boys but did not declare the continuation of the relationship, raised hope, gave hope, choosing only men who shared her values or met strict requirements, e.g., In the opinion of the respondent and her mother, a man has to take care of a woman, take care of the house. As a result, he can wash, clean, cook, be independent and take care of his partner in these matters). Lack of stable relationships and feelings may result from frequent changes of reference groups – religious groups, which the respondent could not fit into as well find her place. More importantly, despite her sincere desire and longing, the respondent did not take responsibility for the relationships she had formed, since once asked about loyalty and trustworthiness, she stated that it was possible to lie to a partner or spouse about minor matters. During her boyfriend's business trips, she met other men, „colleagues”, seeing nothing wrong with such behaviour, needless to say, without informing her partner. Significantly, she wanted to have children but showed no interest in motherhood, had no contact with young children among her relatives or friends, and focused her attention merely on the search for the ideal partner to be a father of her children, without taking into account the component of responsibility for the partnership or family relationship thus created, which undoubtedly does not constitute a proper realisation of the family function.

7. Considering the professional situation of the analysed case, it proved valuable to study her biography, as this person has „gaps” in her CV both professionally and educationally. After high school graduation, she did not get into her chosen university and began studying in her home town, nevertheless dropped out after the first year – after successfully passing the exam and being accepted to study in Kraków. After the first year, she went to work abroad (caring for the elderly) before returning to her studies. After graduation, she pursued postgraduate studies, the choice of which was dictated by the persuasion of others (friends) without reference to her own abilities and desires – the knowledge gained is not applied. The respondent acknowledged that despite completing studies qualifying her to work at school and numerous attempts, she has given up this job (she has worked

at schools in Kraków several times), looking for a job „suitable for herself”. This results in an extensive CV – she has changed jobs more than ten times in the 13 years since graduating. The motives for the changes were a poor sense of well-being in the workplace, a lack of shared values with her colleagues, a lack of commitment to the teams she worked in, and a failure to internalise the patterns prevalent in contemporary service capitalist enterprises. The approach she searched for work appears fascinating. The woman used recommendations of her acquaintances, i.e., members of religious groups (she worked in one of the schools run by a religious congregation in Kraków), and even jobs in corporations were obtained thanks to contacts and information obtained from friends, which, needless to say, is not a motive for a special discussion, as everyone uses informal networks of connections and the so-called whispered mail, still during the research it was revealed that she used the network of friendship relations connected to religious groups on the following principle: „this woman I met at a vigil and conference, therefore if she works there then I can make an effort too”.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In contemporary society, individuals have various interactions with diverse groups. It reinforces certain Christian attitudes and alleviates the prevalent issue of loneliness. Catholic movements and associations are regarded as clear indicators of the prevailing zeitgeist, reflecting the expectations and aspirations of modern individuals. They provide opportunities for individuals to be acknowledged, valued, and feel like creative and responsible participants in their communities (Borkowski, 2013, p. 127). However, despite their undeniable advantages, religious groups exhibit drawbacks, such as a lack of specificity. Alternative, less neutral terms are available to describe this phenomenon (Kamiński, 2021, p. 19).

Certain religious orientations readily engage in shared interests, forms of commitment, and solidarity with other religious or secular groups. It can manifest in supporting an “ecumenism of human rights” or utilising secular scientific research methods and analyses. On the other hand, some religious groups or institutions do not resist integration into a pluralistic environment but maintain distinct, well-defined ways of life. Meanwhile, certain groups and individuals strive to safeguard the complete autonomy of religious traditions, even within a secular context (Lombaerts, 2011, p. 43).

In Poland, the Church has experienced a decline in its social and moral standing due to socio-political changes. However, it is important not to perceive this as

entirely negative, as it is a characteristic of democratic societies and developed nations. The Church's position should be seen as part of a pluralistic society (Molendowska, 2017, p. 196).

Considering the numerous data obtained as a result of the research, interviews, conversations, observations, and the analysis of documentation and photographs, it should be indicated that in the studied case, the person is characterised by the presence of strong social ties, Mark Granovette's (1973) approach and social capital of the binding type (R. D. Putnam), which was confirmed by the analysis of such indicators as the frequency of relationships, the density of social networks and interactions with members of religious groups, trust in members of these groups and low trust in strangers, the sharing of common values and, importantly, a life strategy of seeking support among this one category of people. It indicates a negative attitude towards making friends and building intimate relationships with individuals from a different social circle or environment. Considering participation in groups of a Catholic nature, it should be pointed out that in the case studied, they do not serve to build a culture of social trust (directing attention towards the mentioned groups) and the realisation of needs and aspirations within these groups. However, it implies a lack of openness to new experiences and was additionally manifested, for instance, by evasive answers to the researcher's questions concerning the knowledge of the contemporary canon of popular (mass) culture, pop culture and the conditions of fashion. In this case, the situation was quite dissimilar, as the questions in this area were dictated by the author's interest in the outfit and appearance of the woman during the meetings, who considered herself attractive and sophisticated, but could not name the latest books, films, works of classical or film music, did not use cosmetics, as well as was familiar with fashion trends from 20 years ago. This results in a specific alienation of the examined person and living next to peers or the community in which she functions, building her own world on her own preferred values.

An important element is the formation of relationships within the aforementioned religious groups or groups of a religious nature. This last wording was used on purpose, for the reason that despite the official character of the functioning of these groups, their charisma and message, the activity of their members was mainly focused on mutual support, mutual help, sharing common life experiences or traumas and searching for solutions to the consequences of various negative events. The formation of religiousness and Christian morality in these groups recedes into the background, putting the realisation of the particular interests of their members in the foreground. It raises questions about the legitimacy of the functioning of the mentioned groups in the context of their influence on the

formation of negative social capital – Agnieszka Barczykowska (2012) wrote about this. In this context, reference can be made to the nature of the ties created by the examined person – R. D. Putnam’s approach is inclusive and exclusive. Michael Woolcock and Fabio Sabatini defined bonding social capital, bridging social capital, and linking social capital. Jarosław Działek distinguished closing social capital and opening social capital, and Francis Fukuyama referred to bonding capital as family cultures’ (Szast, 2017). Negative social capital was addressed by Alejandro Portes in his work *Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology*. He listed several consequences of negative social capital. Among others, he stated that it may contribute to limiting outsiders’ access to resources (professional corporations), calling such situations the *exclusion of outsiders*. Moreover, social control within a given social group adversely affects the individual development of individuals, as it limits their autonomy by adopting norms binding in a given group (*restrictions on individual freedoms*), reducing individualism of the individual, as any successes may be perceived as a threat to group cohesion – *downward levelling of norms* (Szast, 2017). At this point, it should be emphasised that the respondent’s participation in religious groups implies negative effects on her life due to the construction of social ties almost exclusively within one type of community – religious communities. It makes her life poorer due to the deficit of new acquaintances, openness to change, following contemporary canons of beauty (fashion, shaping one’s own image), establishing emotional relations using patterns other than those adopted in religious groups (*linking social capital* otherwise known as *bonding social capital* or *strong ties*).

Taking into account the analysed case, two final remarks arise. The first remark is the image of a human emerging from the research, whose life somehow „slips away between his fingers”, despite being very active. The second remark points to the value of the undertaken analysis as a valuable source of information on people with an unformed identity, drifting character of identity, lost in performing social roles, in search for their role and place in life, not knowing peace, asylum and self-fulfilment, who constantly strive for something, entangling their lives in the meanders of complicated relations set around values professed by groups they identify with.

## References

- Barczykowska, A. (2012). Pozytywny, negatywny czy neutralny? Pytanie o naturę kapitału społecznego. *Studia Edukacyjne*, 22, 81–95.
- Boguszewski, R. (2015). Religia a życie codzienne, czyli m.in. o wyznaniach dla Kościoła Katolickiego w Polsce. *Colloquium Wydziału Nauk Humanistycznych i Społecznych AMW*, 4, 27–44.
- Borkowski, T. (2013). Natura relacji w grupach religijnych i ich wpływ na religijność młodzieży. *Fides Es Ratio*, 3(15)2013, 119–129.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In J. C. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research of Sociology of Education* (pp. 117–142). Greenwood Press.
- Bożewicz, M. (2020). *Religijność Polaków w ostatnich 20 latach*. Komunikat z badań 63/2020. Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej.
- Bożewicz, M. (2022). *Zmiany religijności Polaków po pandemii*. Komunikat z badań 85/2022. Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej.
- Coleman, J. (1998). Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 94, 95–120.
- Górny, A. (1998). *Wybrane zagadnienia podejścia jakościowego w badaniach nad migracjami*. Seria: Prace Migracyjne, nr 20. Instytut Studiów Społecznych UW.
- Granovetter, M. (1973). The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 79(6), 1360–1380.
- Growiec, K. (2011). *Kapitał społeczny. Geneza i społeczne konsekwencje*. Academica Wydawnictwo SWPS.
- Kamiński, I. (2021). Sekty i alternatywne ruchy religijne. Stan wiedzy – próba systematyzacji. *Roczniki Kulturoznawcze*, XII(4), 17–40.
- Kozuch, A., & Marzec, I. (2014). Studium przypadku jako strategia badawcza w naukach społecznych. *Zeszyty Naukowe WSOWL*, 2(172), 32–44.
- Lisiak, M. (2015). Transformacje religijności Polaków – wybrane aspekty religijnej zmiany. *Symposium*, 2(29), 29–50.
- Lombaerts, H. (2011). The Impact of the Status of Religion in Contemporary Society upon Interreligious Learning. *The Person and the Challenges*, 1(2), 21–53.
- Mizerek, H. (2017). Studium przypadku w badaniach nad edukacją. Istota i paleta zastosowań. *Przegląd Pedagogiczny*, 1, 9–22.
- Molendowska, M. M. (2017). Christian Democracy in Poland (19th–21st Century). *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowsk Lublin – Polonia*, XXIV(1), 179–199.
- Putnam, R. (1995). *Demokracja w działaniu. Tradycje obywatelskie we współczesnych Włoszech*. Znak.
- Putnam, R. (2009). *Samotna gra w kręgle*. Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne.
- Stachowska, E. (2017). Mediatyzacja religii w Polsce. Wybrane aspekty w kontekście koncepcji S. Hjarvarda. *Uniwersyteckie Czasopismo Socjologiczne*, 21(4), 41–55.
- Szast, M. (2017). Amoralny familizm – negatywny kapitał społeczny w obrębie rodziny, Pedagogia Ojcostwa. *Katolicki Przegląd Społeczno-Prawno-Pedagogiczny. Czasopismo Instytutu Medycznego Im. Jana Pawła II w Szczecinie*, 14, 42–54.



- Szczepaniak, K. (2012). Zastosowanie analizy treści w badaniach artykułów prasowych – refleksje metodologiczne. *Acta Universitatis Lodzianis. Folia Sociologica*, 42, 83–112.
- Zarycki, T. (2008). Dwa wymiary kapitału społecznego w kontekście polskim. *Pomorski Przegląd Gospodarczy*, 2(37), 49–52.
- Ziemiński, Z. (1994). *Elementy socjologii*. Ars Boni et Aequi.