

# The organisational activity of young people from Cieszyn Silesia (Polish-Czech borderland)<sup>[1]</sup>

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**Abstract :** *The article aims to present the elements of the social capital of young people living in Cieszyn Silesia. For this purpose, the author exploits Znaniecki's concept of expansive aspirations for independence and Putnam's concept of bridging capital (bridging capital). The study was conducted from October 2012 to January 2013 in Cieszyn Silesia, in schools located in Cieszyn, Skoczów, Ustroń and Istebna.*

**Keywords** *Aspirations for social independence, social capital (bridging capital), young people, Cieszyn Silesia*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the primary indicators of social capital is life satisfaction (Putnam, 1993). Znaniecki attributes this feeling to expansive aspirations (1974). According to the above-mentioned Polish sociologist, feelings that would indicate a low socialisation level are characterised by actions of restrictive nature<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, according to Znaniecki, a particularly important feature that enables people to undertake any action is optimism connected with fulfilling people's social roles. Optimism and self-belief manifest themselves in a social situation, *i.e.* when a given social role played by a causal agent interacts with another social role. Znaniecki notes that these traits are necessary for any group action since expansive aspirations for independence alone will not suffice. Their absence causes the transfer of activity to the actions that can be performed outside of any social groups (Znaniecki, 1974, 134). In this paper, I will discuss how young people's activism, which can be defined as bridging capital in Putnam's terms, is represented. Additionally, Znaniecki's concept will be useful in interpreting certain social phenomena. However, it lacks specific guidelines that would answer the following question – how to research? Therefore, at the indicator level, I use the dimensions of Putnam's bridging social capital.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper discusses the following issues:

1. What is the structure of young people's formal activity?
2. What organisations do young people belong to?
3. What is the role of the church in formal activity?
4. What is the structure of young people's formal activity?

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<sup>1</sup> The revised version of the fragment of the book authored by Berenika Dyczek entitled *Kapitał kulturowy i społeczny młodzieży na Śląsku Cieszyńskim* [Cultural and social capital of young people in Cieszyn Silesia] published by Chronicon Publishing House, Wrocław, 2020, pp 199-204.

<sup>2</sup> Znaniecki was not familiar with the term *social capital*. However, his sociological theory includes the concept of socialisation which partly overlaps with the meaning of social capital.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **General population**

The field research was carried out from October 2012 to January 2013. The research group included students from a general education secondary school, a technical secondary school and a vocational school. The year of birth of the vast majority of the students (*i.e.* 98.3%) was between 1994 and 1997. The research was carried out in Cieszyn Silesia, in schools based in Cieszyn, Skoczów, Ustroń and Istebna. The total number of students in 2010/2011 was 6110 and the sample size was calculated using the formula  $n = 358$  (Greń, 1984, 246).

#### **Instruments and procedures**

The data were collected through a questionnaire completed by students during school hours. The questionnaire contained 71 questions and was divided into four sections. The first part dealt with socio-economic and demographic data; the second one was related to linguistic and cultural competence; the third one was devoted to social capital while the fourth part was dedicated to educational capital. The scope of this paper is limited since it examines only the issues concerning the elements of social capital.

### **4. THEORETICAL CONCEPTS APPLIED**

Bridging capital manifests itself in the participation of social actors in various types of organised groups. These organisations are associations and bring together people from different backgrounds. They can be sports and cultural clubs, companies, trade unions, associations of various nature or young people's organisations bringing together young people from different schools. While a specific goal binds the tasks these groups have to perform, they can also serve as a "bridge" for forming networks of connections and ties among groups or people who would not otherwise come into contact with one another (Putnam 2003; Fukuyama 1997). These groups' collective actions can exert pressure on superior authorities and demand certain benefits, thanks to the social capital accumulated in these communities.

In Znaniecki's approach, four main classes of person-forming aspirations can be distinguished: aspirations for expansive and restrictive compliance as well as expansive and restrictive aspirations for independence (1974). In this article, I am interested only in aspirations for expansive independence. They characterise an individual who pursues an organisational or artistic initiative (Znaniecki, 1974, 134). Individuals with these skills can initiate new ventures and associations in their communities or create an entirely new organisation.

The following dimensions were examined within the framework of expansive aspirations for independence: the structure of formal activity, the types of formal organisations, the church's role in formal activity and the structure of informal activity.

### **5. THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

#### **Activity associated with secular organisations**

As it results from Table no. 48, almost 35% of the young people from Cieszyn Silesia belong to organisations or associations. In comparison with nationwide studies on young people's social capital, in which approximately 17% of the respondents declare such participation (Fatyga 2005, 09), these data clearly indicate that a much greater percentage of the young people living in Cieszyn – at least in the declarative sphere – function as civil society. Additionally, in the research conducted by the Centre for Young People Youth Research Centre of the Institute of

Applied Social Sciences of the University of Warsaw, membership of organisations was not divided into formal and informal groups. In this research, by contrast, I asked only about formal organisations. Therefore, it is easy to conclude that the percentage difference seems even more remarkable in this context. The authors of the study referred to above add that the most frequently cited formal organisation was scouting.

**Table no. 1. Young people's participation in social organisations and associations.**

Are you a member of an organisation or association?	N=318	Frequency
1. Yes	34.3% <sup>2</sup>	109
2. No	65.7%	209
Total	100%	318

**Table no. 2. Unpaid work.**

Have you done any unpaid volunteer work in the last year?	N=318
Yes	47.6%
No	52.4%

**Table no. 3. Organisations that young people belong to.<sup>3</sup>**

Type of organisation	N=109
Sports organisations	15.4%
Musical, theatrical or artistic nature organisations	9.8%
Social organisations	7%
Religious organisations	6.9%

Among the young people from Cieszyn Silesia, the most popular organisations are those of sports character (almost half of them). The second place is occupied by the organisations whose activities are connected with culture in its broadest sense. Social and religious organisations follow this. These statistics indicate that young people constitute a community that fulfils the basic premise of civil society in the realm of praxis. What points to this is, among other things, the diversity of the organisations and their secular character. Although religion for the young inhabitants of Cieszyn Silesia is an essential element of social life, as evidenced by the numerous churches of various denominations that can be found, for example, in Cieszyn, Skoczów or Wisła, religiousness is not the dominant factor influencing students' activity. Coleman believes that organisation membership alone is not a reliable indicator for measuring social capital because it does not examine activity. This type of data indicates the passive side of social capital (1994). In these surveys, apart from declaring membership, the respondents were asked to write the nature of the work performed in a given organisation. The correlation between membership and activity in organisations is  $\Phi = 0.93$ . Therefore, it can be assumed that in this case, the passive level overlaps with the activity level.

<sup>3</sup> In comparison, the national Polish data show a much smaller participation of all Poles in non-governmental organisations. In 2002, membership of non-governmental organisations was declared by 12.4% of the population, a minority of which is membership supported by actual activity. Cf.: P. Gliński, "Obszary aktywności i apatii obywatelskiej", pp. 275-276 [in:] *Jedna Polska? Dawne i nowe różnicowania społeczne*, Kraków 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Percentages do not add up due to multiple responses.

In the next question, the same principle was applied. The respondents answered a question about membership of organisations and were then asked to describe the type of task they performed and the organiser if they know it. The Phi correlation coefficient between the answer to one and the other question was 0.96.

**Table no. 4. Service for the local community.**

<b>During the past year, did you happen to become involved in activities for the local community (municipality, housing estate, town, neighbourhood)?</b>	<b>N=318</b>
Yes	19.2%
No	80.8%
Total	100%

**Table no. 5. The character of the service for the local community.**

<b>Nature of the action</b>	<b>N=57</b>
Social	12.6%
Cultural	3.8%
Religious	0.9%
Sports	0.6%

The percentage of young people who participated in community activities is significantly lower than the percentage of young people who belonged to organisations. It was 19.2%. Hence, an important question can be asked here: where does this difference come from? It can be assumed that organisations and associations are closer to young people due to the possibility of pursuing their own interests there. Besides, the functioning of a formal structure that organises certain meetings at a certain time influences the establishment of new acquaintances and friendships, which is a factor that causes the permanence of this type of meetings. The data concerning the young people from Cieszyn Silesia show that community life involvement is lower than the involvement in organisations. Among the young people who declared such involvement, tasks of social nature are definitely predominant. In most cases, it was voluntary work. However, in the case of cultural activities, young people cited a film festival while in the case of social work, the most frequent answer was activity related to work in a hospice and participation in the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity [*Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy*], which should be interpreted as a national rather than local phenomenon. The above data show that, in the sociological sense, young people's involvement in activities for the local community was scanty. However, there were two responses such as "helping the nearest neighbours" and "helping to tidy the neighbourhood garden".

**Table no. 6. Membership of organisations.**

<b>How many organisations do you belong to?</b>	<b>N=105</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
To one	22.3 %	71
To two	8.8 %	28
To three	1.9 %	6

The next set of data shows how many organisations young people identify themselves with. The vast majority of young people declaring membership of organisations opted for one organisation (22.3%) or two organisations (8.8%). In the context of the results cited above, these data indicate a strong identification with organisations, which translates into action within them. It is difficult to imagine that a person belonging to ten organisations could be active in all of them.

### Activities related to the institution of the church

Civic involvement is stimulated not only by the level of education but also by people's affiliation to religious groups. Volunteerism and philanthropy have traditionally been among the concerns of all churches. Those who are affiliated with a church and participate in religious practices are more likely to donate their time, work and money to philanthropy both within and outside their parish. Affiliation to religious organisations fosters community service and thus the development of interpersonal bonds. Churches are important providers of social services. In Poland, this function is performed by the Catholic Caritas, which collects money donated by the faithful for social purposes, running schools, hospitals, and nursing homes for children, the elderly and the disabled. In Cieszyn Silesia, this kind of activity is also performed by Protestants, who run their primary and secondary schools as well as nursing homes. A relationship has been observed between Protestantism and high social capital (Park & Smith 2000). Interestingly enough, this relationship is also confirmed in this study.

Below I present the results of the research on young people's activity related to the institution of the church, without taking into account the division into the Catholic Church or the Evangelical Church.

**Table no. 7. On average, how often per month do you attend church services or other religious gatherings?**

Frequency	N=318
Almost every day	1.9%
Up to five times	58.2%
Up to ten times	19.8%
Rarely	0.3%
I do not attend them at all	19.8%
Total	100%

It can be noted that the largest group, *i.e.* 58.2%, is made up of the respondents who attend religious services or other religious meetings more or less once a week. Besides, a relatively large group of nearly 20% of the respondents does so even more often. It is also significant that about 20% of the study participants declared no interest in such meetings.

Slightly more than 20% of the young people said they participated in additional activities organised by the church. This is a similar result to the one obtained for community involvement or membership of organisations. 72.3% of the young people participating in church activities attend discussion meetings on social issues or Bible study meetings, followed by cultural or musical meetings (16.9%). The results presented above point to a lifestyle expressed in collective religious practices. "Religious practices are not only a model of faith, that is, a religious doctrine translated into behavioural patterns, but they are also a model (pattern) for individual faith. They are not only an expression of the essence of the faith but also the deepest manifestation of religiousness" (Świątkiewicz, 2010, 117.)

**Table no. 8. Young people’s interest in church-related activities.**

Does the church you belong to organise additional activities that you are interested in and often participate in?	N=312
Yes	21.8%
No	75.6%
I do not belong to the church	2.6%
Total	100%

**Table no. 9. Types of activities provided by Churches.**

Types of activities	N=65	N=318	Frequency
Discussion or Bible study meetings, “OAZA”[a Catholic youth movement]	14.8%	72.3%	47
Educational meetings, Sunday school	0.9%	4.6%	3
Cultural or musical meetings	3.5%	16.9%	11
Trips: pilgrimages, camps	1.3%	6.2%	4
Total	20%	100%	65

**Informal activity:the structure of leisure activities**

Table no. 10 illustrates how the young people from Cieszyn Silesia spend their free time during school days and during weekends (*i.e.* on days free from school). This indicates a high awareness of leisure organisation and the existence of its clear place in practice. The data show that the respondents can combine entertainment with other activities and manage their time rationally.

**Table no. 10. Extracurricular activities during the school week and on non-school days.**

Types of activities	Day off	School day
1. Entertainment	41.5%	71.1%
2. Hobbies	17.3%	13.8%
3. Household activities	37.1%	15.7%
4. Additional learning (private lessons)	1.9%	2.5%
5. Time spent with family	25.2%	8.5%
6. Time spent with friends	46.9%	23%
7. Sports and time spent on outdoor activities	11.9%	10.4%
8. Rest, relaxation	17.6%	10.1%
9. Doing homework	30.2%	66.4%
10. Gainful employment	5.7%	1.6%
11. Trips	3.7%	0%

In the statistics obtained for school days, entertainment (71.1%) and doing homework (66.4%) ranked first and second. What it shows is that the students have the ability to balance entertainment with learning. Additionally, young people find time for household activities (15.7) and hobbies (13.8). Time management skills constitute an essential set of young people’s skills. The students who participated in the study also use it to help their parents perform household activities on those days when they are not compulsorily at school. It points to a relatively strong relationship with the family. In the data regarding days, the following items were ranked first: time spent with friends (46.9%), entertainment (41.5%), household activities (37.1%), doing homework (30.2%) and time spent with family (25.2%). The data show that social relationships

within peer and family groups are highly significant for the young people inhabiting the region since more than 70% of the respondents devote time to them during weekends.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The social capital manifested in young people's membership and activity in non-governmental organisations points to the local community's rich life. The largest number of the young people belongs to organisations focusing on sports. The second place is occupied by the organisations, whose activities are of cultural character. It shows that the folklore from the Cieszyn Region and its Silesian-Cieszyn character is vital and maintained by both the older and young people. The young people of Cieszyn Silesia are aware of the importance of social activity; they highly appreciate personal activity for general social benefit. Voluntary non-governmental organisations are the right place to acquire various types of social competences. However, in the case of the young people living in Cieszyn Silesia, the behavioural patterns and dispositions acquired during socialisation in the family and at school are the most important.

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