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The Role of Values and Norms in Triggering Social Capital

Rola wartości i norm w wyzwaniu kapitału społecznego

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to highlight the role of values and moral norms in generating social capital, a fundamental component of civil society. This study was developed based on the analysis of secondary sources. It has been found that moral values and norms are key determinants in the quality of social capital resources. When social capital creation is founded on recognised values and moral norms, such capital becomes a resource that encourages social development. It enhances social solidarity, fosters trust, and forms the foundation for collaborative efforts towards the common good. However, when the axionormative system is excluded from social capital generation, it assumes a 'dirty' form, benefiting only a small group of privileged individuals.

Keywords: moral values and norms, social capital, civil society, social modernisation

Abstrakt

Celem publikacji jest ukazanie roli wartości i norm moralnych w procesie generowania kapitału społecznego, będącego niezbędnym elementem społeczeństwa obywatelskiego. Opracowanie powstało w oparciu o analizę źródeł zastanych. Ustalono, iż wartości i normy moralne są czynnikiem decydującym o jakości zasobów kapitału społecznego. Jeśli budowanie kapitału społecznego opiera się na uznawanych wartościach i normach moralnych, wtedy kapitał ten staje się zasobem stymulującym rozwój społeczny. Przyczynia się do wzmacniania solidarności społecznej i budowania zaufania, a także jest podstawą współdziałania na rzecz dobra wspólnego. Natomiast gdy w generowaniu kapitału społecznego pomija się system aksjonormatywny, wówczas przybiera on „brudną” formę, a z jego zasobów korzysta tylko niewielka grupa uprzywilejowanych jednostek.

Słowa kluczowe: wartości i normy moralne, kapitał społeczny, społeczeństwo obywatelskie, modernizacja społeczna

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Introduction

There is a shared belief among scholars across various social science disciplines that social capital is a critical element in the operation of a democratic state and civil society, as well as a prerequisite and foundation for sustainable, balanced social development. Generated at different societal levels, it disseminates most effectively and magnifies its influence in local communities (Michalewska-Pawlak, 2010, pp. 185–186). It is associated with values and norms, mutual trust, empowerment, and relationships, and it fosters the growth of social activism, responsibility for the common good, and the capacity to cooperate within groups and communities (Goszczyński, 2010, p. 203). Increasing social capital resources, and thereby building a civil society, requires awareness of the benefits of individual participation in the community, a sense of identification with the group, and cooperation to achieve desired benefits and realise collective goals and objectives (Sztumski, 2005, p. 55). Social capital is a non-economic resource positively impacting social, political, and economic development and enhancing the mechanisms that shape civil society. Civil society is rooted in social solidarity, born from community consciousness and a sense of unity among free, equal, and socially committed individuals. Their grassroots activities and self-organisation extend beyond specific interests, aiming towards the common good (Sztompka, 2007, p. 40).

The sustainable, effective, and balanced development of democratic states and civil societies assumes the continuous use of social capital resources as a key element of the democratic order and citizen well-being (Coleman, 1994, p. 300; Frykowski & Starosta, 2008, p. 38; Michalewska-Pawlak, 2010, p. 185). Primarily endogenous development factors trigger social capital generation, creating externalities that benefit individuals associated with the community (Barnaszewski, 2010, pp. 59–61). Based on trust and universally acknowledged values and norms, social capital connects individuals to the community, enabling them to participate in collective resources. According to the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama (1996, pp. 26–27), the source of this capital is culture, tradition, and particularly religion, which generate values, moral norms, and social virtues that cultivate a climate of trust and form the foundation of the social order.

In contrast, social modernisation and socio-cultural pluralism characteristic of (post)modern societies are weakening the influence of religion and disrupting the system of traditional values and norms that provide trust, order, and social cohesion. Previously recognised axionormative systems and behavioural patterns are losing their dominant relevance due to the perpetual expansion of personal individual freedom. In (post)modern societies, the roles of individualism, consumerism, moral relativism, and permissiveness are increasing (Jasińska-Kania,

2007, pp. 333–334). The deterioration of traditional value systems and norms suggests negative social trends, leading to law violations, the proliferation of pathology and crime, the breakdown of social order, and a decline in the level of trust. These changes, which undermine the foundations of the social order, lead to the fragmentation of social bonds and societal atomisation, as well as heightened demoralisation (Fukuyama, 2000, pp. 14–15; Radziewicz-Winnicki, 2009, p. 16).

The growing processes of secularisation and the privatisation of religion in (post)modern societies, particularly in Western Europe, are reducing the significance of religiosity and morality in social life. Secularisation is becoming the leading process in contemporary European culture, with agnosticism and atheism emerging as its new religion (*Wojna religii z nowoczesnością?*, 2007). Modernist tendencies negatively impact previously recognised axionormative systems, typically rooted in traditional religions. Socio-cultural shifts contribute to the devaluation of once-accepted values and moral norms. The rising popularity of liberalism has made promoting individualism, relativism, and moral nihilism fashionable.

New ideas and worldview trends drive social change, influencing societies where social capital plays a significant role. These changes, particularly those involving the marginalisation of universal moral values and norms in social life, undermine the foundations of the established social order and, consequently, affect the level of social capital and the effectiveness of its transmission. As such, this paper examines the role of moral values and norms in generating social capital. The aim of the study is to examine the impact of the axionormative system on the development of social capital, which constitutes an indispensable element of civil society. The research questions addressed in this study are as follows: How do socio-cultural changes, one manifestation of which is the marginalisation of traditional values and norms in social life, affect social capital? Does the disregard for fundamental values and norms in social relations, as well as moral relativism and permissiveness, lead to the depreciation of social capital? To address these research questions, the author employed a desk-based research approach based on the analysis of secondary sources. The analysis primarily draws on social science literature concerning social capital and highlighting the role of moral values and norms in its generation. Based on the having body of knowledge, it may be assumed that the abandonment of traditional axionormative systems – and, in some cases, their erosion or elimination from social life – contributes to the disintegration of social capital, particularly through the weakening of trust grounded in shared values and norms.

1. Morality in the Process of Socio-Cultural Change

In contemporary democratic states, often under the control of left-liberal elites, liberalism is the prevailing political doctrine shaping social and economic systems. In liberal democracies, state institutions operate society and the economy based on free-market capitalist principles (Fukuyama, 1997, pp. 397–398). This means the state does not refer to specific cultural or religious values and norms, but relies on socio-cultural pluralism that, by equating all values, norms, and behaviours, obscures the distinction between good and evil, truth and falsehood, virtue and vice. Tolerance is regarded as a leading social virtue, superseding morality. The diversity of views on ethical issues results in moral relativism becoming the dominant trend in (post)modern societies. Absolute freedom and tolerance become the roots of individualism and permissiveness, causing a breakdown of social bonds. Individual morality primarily considers personal interests, with the individual, exercising their right to absolute freedom, deciding what is right and wrong (Mariański, 2022, pp. 144–148).

In (post)modern societies, it is widely accepted that no objective criteria exist to distinguish between good and evil. Individuals without clear moral principles create a subjective system of values and norms that legitimises their choices and influences personal attitudes and behaviours (Mariański, 2014a, p. 67). People's moral decisions hinge on the particular situation and the evolving circumstances, and the transient stability of a society that fails to recognise fixed and unchanging moral values and norms emanates from fluid, *ad hoc* compromises struck to reconcile differing political interests (Mariański, 2022, pp. 186, 194–195). Traditional morality and the religions that underpin it become merely one among many competing commodities in the marketplace of new ideas and worldviews, where the individual is free to choose autonomously (Berger, 1997, pp. 185–186).

Excessive individualism and moral relativism, which characterise contemporary liberal democracies, constitute – according to some scholars – one of the most serious long-term challenges to these democracies, as they deprive them of a stable moral consensus that underpins social order (Fukuyama, 2000, p. 19). An ideology that contests fundamental moral principles and undermines previously recognised human rights and responsibilities inevitably results in a crisis of democracy and a pluralistic society. This is due to the disruption of the social structure's coherence, the existing order, and its axiological foundations (Mariański, 2022, p. 195).

Social modernisation has destabilised traditional axionormative systems, leading to the erosion and disintegration of many of them. The erosion of moral norms and the values of the normative system results in a moral crisis, manifested in increased crime, alcohol and drug consumption, as well as the

weakening of the family institution and the breakdown of family ties. The growing prevalence of social dysfunctions undermines the stability of social structures, as there is a clear correlation between social deviance, lack of trust, and the atomisation of society.

The American political scientist and economist F. Fukuyama's (2000, pp. 14–17) in-depth analysis of the changes brought about by the moral crisis demonstrated that the nature of interpersonal relations had undergone a significant transformation. Interpersonal bonds became less stable and increasingly limited to smaller social groups. Individuals grew less trusting not only of other participants in social life but also of social institutions. On the basis of statistical data analysis, the scholar concluded that the “great upheaval of social values” that had prevailed in traditional societies led to the collapse of the existing social order. The weakening of social bonds and the disintegration of value systems sustaining communities resulted in crises across various dimensions of social life.

According to F. Fukuyama (2000, pp. 15–17), the preservation of social order requires the reconstruction of a moral framework that ensures a sense of security and provides a foundation for cooperation and the self-organisation of decentralised individuals. Internalised conduct rules are essential for citizens' self-organisation and cooperation, and are a source of social order. By contributing to higher levels of social trust, recognised values and norms reduce the prominence of individualism and moral relativism; they also create a cohesive bond that builds communities and social groups and facilitates social participation by fostering a sense of belonging and shaping dispositions towards spontaneous cooperation within voluntary associations. Liberal democracy's proper functioning hinges on its reliance on “certain shared cultural values” (Fukuyama, 2000, p. 20). Consequently, there is growing interest in moral capital understood as a set of moral relations operating at both the individual and community levels. Its resources, commonly referred to as social virtues, shape the moral identity of individuals and communities alike. Moral relations, manifested *inter alia* in trust, loyalty, respect, justice, reciprocity, and concern for the common good, contribute to the formation of a moral space. Moral capital resources sustain the moral community by restraining egoism and excessive individualism, while simultaneously facilitating cooperation and strengthening social ties and networks (Łuczewski, 2017, pp. 112–113, 115).

Social researchers unequivocally argue that society cannot function without recognised values and moral rules, which constitute the axionormative foundation of social order (Sadłoń, 2014, p. 22; Sztompka, 2021, p. 486). Adherence to values and norms cultivates a sense of community and fortifies social bonds, hence “true communities are bound by shared values, norms, and experiences” (Fukuyama, 2000, p. 23). Norms can span from widely disseminated societal values about God and justice to secular modes of human behaviour regulation

(Fukuyama, 1997, p. 38). In Christianity, the most important and firmly established rules include the Decalogue and norms associated with the defence of human life, altruism as conveyed through the commandment of loving one's neighbour, as well as marriage and family (Adamczuk, 2009, p. 136). Moral norms are vital for the survival of any society, since their absence would certainly signal the demise of tyrant-free civil societies that respect human rights (Sztompka, 2007, p. 150).

Moral relationships, including trust, loyalty, reciprocity, solidarity, respect, fairness, and the honouring of commitments, constitute a fundamental part of social life. The repertoire of moral relationships generates a moral space, which by intermingling in the interpersonal sphere, forms the social order (Sztompka, 2016, p. 150, 153–154). The norms that set the boundaries of human freedom are encapsulated in the principle: “Act in such a way that, while pursuing your own goals, you do not compromise the interests and objectives of others” (Sztompka, 2021, p. 486). Social rules cannot be reduced to the individual and subjective ethical convictions of particular persons. As sociologist Émile Durkheim argued, they constitute social facts shared by the collectivity and exert pressure on the behaviour of its members (Sztompka, 2021, p. 487). Similarly, sociologist Piotr Sztompka (2021, pp. 486–487) maintains that norms constitute social facts recognised and accepted by society and serve as imperatives guiding individual behaviour. These norms cannot be replaced by private and discretionary principles derived from individual preferences and choices. Only a form of morality independent of individual evaluations and arbitrary judgements can provide a stable foundation for social order in both small- and large-scale social structures, while also initiating and sustaining that order (Mariański, 2014b, p. 42).

A more cautious stance towards morality as a social fact is adopted by the Polish ethicist and sociologist Maria Ossowska (Misztal, 2025, p. 176). In her analysis of morality as a social fact, the scholar focuses on highlighting interpretative ambiguities arising from different conceptual approaches (Ossowska, 1963, pp. 181–199). She nevertheless concurs with the view that an ethical system recognised by the collectivity deeply permeates social life and that its acceptance assumes a mass character (Ossowska, 1963, p. 110). The researcher has no doubt that moral norms are binding within specific communities because they satisfy elementary needs shared by all participants in social life; however, she expresses scepticism regarding their universality and inclines towards cognitive moral relativism (Ossowska, 1963, pp. 116–117; Misztal, 2017, p. 217).

The foregoing analysis indicates that the erosion of the moral foundations of society poses a serious challenge to the durability of social order and to the principles of democracy based on equality, tolerance, and universal respect for human rights and human dignity. The progressive privatisation of morality and moral relativism undermine the foundations of society and lead to radical indi-

vidualism, which places individual benefits and subjective self-interest above the common good. Contemporary individuals operating within pluralistic societies most often make choices on the basis of self-defined subjective criteria that prioritise their own interests while disregarding the common good (Giddens, 2006, p. 198–199). Within liberal democracies, individual gain is prioritised over the common good and moral norms, and social bonds are supplanted by relationships anchored in vested interests (Fukuyama, 2000, pp. 228–229).

In pluralistic societies, there prevailed a belief that norms and values removed from social life could be replaced by legal regulations. However, it turns out that legislative solutions proposed by state institutions are incapable of replacing the system of values and norms that is indispensable for the self-organisation of individuals in decentralised civil societies. State authorities and public institutions lack the social legitimacy either to suggest specific patterns of behaviour on citizens. The history of the twentieth century shows that an excess of political power, coupled with its dominant role in determining rules of conduct, may lead not only to centralisation but also to the totalisation of the socio-political system. The expulsion of the moral principles that guarantee each person's freedom of choice and equality before the law from social life, and their replacement by moral nihilism, presents not only the risk of regressing into social Darwinism, but also enables political power to augment its authority and sovereign prerogatives to ensure social order. This can ultimately result in overt or covert totalitarianism (Jan Paweł II, 1993, pp. 147–149, 152; 2006, p. 683; See Fukuyama, 1997, p. 399). The disintegration of a system of universal values and norms may result in societies that fail to recognise fundamental ethical principles becoming disorganised and atomised collectivities, incapable of pursuing common goals and susceptible to control and manipulation by centres of power through social engineering techniques (Fukuyama, 2000, p. 23).

2. Morality as a Social Capital Resource Shaping Pro-social Attitudes and Behaviour

According to academia, the response to the individualisation of social life, which results in the breakdown of social ties, the eradication of relational networks, and the atomisation and fragmentation of society, is social capital. It encourages self-organisation, self-governance, and grassroots initiatives, thereby curbing centralised governmental decision-making and shielding civil societies from political and ideological interference by political and ideological central factors (Craig & Storr, 2022, pp. 123-147). It offers an alternative to ideologies advocating individualism, consumerism, rivalry, competition, and moral relativism that undermine societal foundations. In societies with an op-

timal reservoir of social capital, social structures function correctly without the need for intervention from central state authorities (Bokajło, 2010, pp. 22–23). Citizens, guided by a sense of responsibility for the common good, participate in the process of governing the state by influencing decisions taken by public authorities. They also participate in the activities of independent civil organisations characterised by self-organisation, grassroots initiatives, pluralism, and concern for public affairs. Autonomous organisations bringing citizens together facilitate the establishment of social contacts and foster dispositions towards cooperation. An increase in the level of social capital contributes to the decentralisation of state structures and to a reduction in state interventionism and paternalism. It also promotes transparency in the exercise of power and helps to prevent abuses of authority (Łeseczko, 2000, p. 30).

The crux of social capital lies in individual interactions for communal benefit, founded on shared values and norms, community responsibility, and frequent mutual trust and communication. It provides a counterweight to the brutal competition of individuals exclusively focused on personal interests and gain. Cooperation, as opposed to competition amongst selfishly disposed, disconnected entities, yields greater benefits for individuals and society (Fukuyama, 1997, p. 398). Social capital fulfils an integrative role in society, as it constitutes a non-economic resource based on cooperation, trust, and values and norms oriented towards the common good and social solidarity. Social researchers regard it as a significant factor in social development at both the micro-social and macro-social levels (Markowska-Przybyła, 2023, pp. 202–203). This is because it strengthens mutual trust, reduces transaction costs and the costs of implementing collective undertakings, enhances the credibility of contracting parties, prevents abuses during transactions, limits corruption, and reinforces social solidarity (Libertowska, 2025, p. 55).

Classical concepts of social capital, advanced by F. Fukuyama, Robert D. Putnam, James Coleman, and Pierre Bourdieu, underscore the importance of moral values and norms and trust built upon them for community building and the augmentation of citizen wealth and well-being. Social capital is an intangible asset convertible into various other forms of capital such as material, human, cultural, political, and economic (See Ziółkowski, 2012, pp. 18–19, 21–23). Socially recognised values and norms play a pivotal role in forming social capital, as they foster the mutual trust required for individuals to assemble into communities and cooperate for common good (Fukuyama, 2000, p. 24). F. Fukuyama (2000, p. 24) defines social capital as “the set of informal values and norms that members of a group recognise and that enable them to cooperate”. It is an asset resulting from societal trust prevalence (Fukuyama, 1997, p. 38). R.D. Putnam (1995, pp. 258, 265–270; 2002, p. 8; 2008, p. 552) identifies social capital with civic engagement and interaction, social relationship associations and networks,

and reciprocity norms that foster trust. Trust is the cornerstone and essential element of social capital (Putnam, 2000; p. 137; Sztompka, 2007, pp. 244–245). Social capital is connected to civic virtues (honesty, promise-keeping, reciprocity, responsibilities fulfilment, truthfulness), having the most substantial impact when embedded in dense and long-lasting social networks and civic engagement networks (Putnam, 2008, p. 33). According to J. Coleman (1992, p. 347; 1994, pp. 300–313; Klimowicz, 2010, p. 48), social capital is a property of the social structure enjoyed by those participating in its generation, activated when group individuals collaborate. Social capital is generated when individuals belonging to a given group cooperate with one another. Values and norms are significant in creating capital and utilising its resources, and in cooperation, transforming individual intentions into common good through positive relationships. P. Bourdieu (1986, pp. 241–258; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 104; Adamczyk, 2013, p. 16) emphasises the social capital dimension related to group participation, where members are bound by mutual trust. Associative activity allows individuals to access the group's resources, based on credibility, which presumes adherence to group-recognised rules.

The emphasis placed by the originators of the concept of social capital on its axionormative aspects indicates that it constitutes a form of moral resource that yields positive outcomes only when it is generated and transmitted in accordance with moral norms. Social capital refers to the values and norms shared by participants in social life, which regulate social relations and give meaning to their actions. Norms of trust, reciprocity, solidarity, and loyalty play a significant role in its generation (Kwiatkowski, 2005, p. 74). Increasing social capital levels curbs individualistic tendencies that trigger the atomisation and fragmentation of (post)modern societies. The growth of social capital, associated with trust and shared values and norms enabling cooperation, fortifies and perpetuates the resilience and longevity of social ties and bolsters social relationship networks. Social research indicates that social capital cannot be generated in the absence of mutual trust (Growiec, 2011, pp. 106–124; Fedyszak-Radziejowska, 2007, pp. 88–89). A prerequisite for building a climate of trust is the recognition of universal values and the observance of accepted moral norms in social life, as only then do the behaviours of interaction partners become predictable and free from uncertainty and mistrust.

A serious challenge for Polish society is posed by the consistently low levels of general social trust identified in successive long-term studies, which rank among the lowest in Europe. Polish society, whose citizens declare relatively high levels of faith and religiosity compared to other European societies, has for some time been experiencing a crisis of social trust that is closely linked to moral values and norms. It appears that one of the underlying causes of this situation is the difficulty Poles experience in observing moral norms, despite

high declarative indicators of religiosity. The legacy of communism, transferred into the new democratic reality, is also a significant factor contributing to the atrophy of social trust. Recognising traditional values and norms is not synonymous with applying them in everyday life, which directly affects the level of trust citizens place in other participants in social life. Consequently, in Polish society – which accepts a traditional axionormative system but applies it only to a limited extent – the level of social trust is almost twice as low as in liberal societies with high levels of secularisation, such as the Scandinavian countries (Domański, 2014a, p. 19; 2014b, p. 12; Omyła-Rudzka, 2022, p. 3). An effective way of counteracting this mistrust is to reduce the gap between the recognition of moral norms and their actual application in everyday life.

Moral resources enhance individuals' capacity for cooperation and for building communities whose members relinquish an excess of freedom in favour of moral principles that constrain freedom of choice and undertake cooperation for the common good of society (Fukuyama, 2000, p. 23; See Bartelski, 2010, pp. 105–107). The stronger individuals adhere to values and norms, the more robust their community sense and bonds with other group members. Shared values and norms augment communication and understanding possibilities and coordinate collective action. In societies where individuals uphold social virtues such as honesty, diligence, reliability, truthfulness, responsibility, reciprocity, commitment honouring, and agreement keeping, it becomes considerably easier to attain jointly desired objectives. Moreover, individuals are more likely to attain wealth and prosperity within moral and integrated communities, as opposed to those characterised by social Darwinism and dominated by the law of the strong. Life experience demonstrates that when moral values and norms are relegated from social life, it jeopardises societal sustainability and negatively impacts its functionality (Fukuyama, 2000, p. 23).

Moral values and norms stimulate altruistic and philanthropic behaviour, thereby engendering social capital. Carrying out acts of kindness and implementing norms of reciprocity contribute to the accumulation of social capital resources (Putnam, 2008, p. 197). Drawing upon social capital research conducted in the United States, sociologist R.D. Putnam (2016) posits that the activities of religious organisations and churches form the institutional foundation for social engagement and the cultivation of pro-citizen attitudes. Additionally, they shape the predisposition towards socially beneficial activities aimed at assisting fellow human beings. Religious morality encourages social activism directed at aiding those in need. In the United States, religious or religion-associated capital constitutes half of social capital. Due to the generous contributions of their followers, religious institutions annually spend between \$15 billion and \$20 billion on social assistance aimed at the poor, the elderly, the homeless, and the sick. Notably, religiously-motivated social programmes prove successful

even where secular strategies fall short. During the process of socialisation, religious morality aids in the internalisation of behaviour patterns that serve the common good.

Awareness of moral responsibilities towards fellow human beings instigates assistance to those in need, a key indicator of social capital. A clear example of the effect of moral values and norms on the increase in social capital levels is the support extended by Poles to Ukrainian war refugees migrating to Poland following the initiation of armed aggression by Russia on 24 February 2022. Instead of constructing camps for the millions of incoming migrants from the east, Poles have demonstrated trust in these strangers, welcoming them into private residences and public buildings. Locals, driven by compassion and a recognised axionormative system, spontaneously share their resources with the newcomers. This aid chiefly involves relocating refugees, providing accommodation, food, clothing, cleaning supplies, organising education for children, and assisting with employment. The support rendered by ordinary citizens is indispensable, representing grassroots activism, altruism, moralism, entrepreneurship, and self-organisation. During the initial phase of wartime migration, the grassroots movement of citizens assisting Ukrainians proved particularly important, as state institutions in Poland had not yet established sufficient procedures nor executed administrative relief measures.

According to the Border Guard in Poland, since the onset of Russia's aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 until the close of 2022, 8,8 million Ukrainian citizens crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border. During this period, around 7 million migrants returned to their home country. The Podkarpackie Voivodeship, marked by high social capital indicators, is especially noteworthy in terms of refugee assistance. Its residents are bound by robust social, religious, and moral ties, as well as a dedication to tradition, religion, and community. The foundation of mutual trust and social solidarity lies in widely held values and moral norms. For several decades, the region has been identified as having some of the highest religiosity rates in Poland. Citizens' commitment to those in need and offering them support is primarily driven by religious and moral reasons, along with empathy, altruism, compassion, and the belief in reciprocation of help in times of need. The Christian principle of neighbourly love, underscored in intergenerational transmission and widely embraced by the region's inhabitants, plays a pivotal role in shaping altruistic and philanthropic attitudes. It encourages them to help all those in need. The accumulation of social capital, intertwined with moral values and norms, emerges as a complex and time-consuming cultural process. Indeed, fostering a culture of trust necessitates the evolution of social behaviours grounded in the belief that social life's participants are reliable partners for collaboration (Fedyszak-Radziejowska, 2007, p. 67). Within the Podkarpackie society, mechanisms and regularities

shaping trust, along with individuals' long-term inclinations to cooperate for the common good and collective benefits, have been established and fortified (Putnam, 2008, pp. 207–208). The organisation of sustained assistance for migrants from Ukraine became possible thanks to the widespread involvement of local residents, volunteers, local authorities, public services, and both secular and religious institutions and organisations. The largest number of war refugees travelled along the main transport route leading from Przemyśl to Rzeszów. As a result, the largest humanitarian aid resources in the region were concentrated in both of these cities. According to the Statistics Poland, the population of Rzeszów increased by 53% during the first war month (from 196,600 to 301,400). Approximately 105,000 refugees from Ukraine resided in the city, with a further 50,000 accommodated within the Rzeszów metropolitan area. The Ukrainian President honoured the Podkarpackie capital with the honorary title of a rescuer city (Ziętał, 2022).

The above facts affirm that moral values and norms form an integral component of social capital, shaping its beneficial impact on society's functionality and development. Social capital speaks the language of morality, aligning itself with values and norms, thereby transforming into a valuable resource that shapes social order and dispositions favouring pro-public-benefit activities. The axionormative rules recognised by society organise social relations and mould cooperation among different elements of the social structure to attain the common good (Adamczyk, 2015, pp. 205–206). They serve as a moral compass guiding human attitudes and actions. Moreover, they construct a climate of trust and an atmosphere for efficient cooperation, establishing a moral space that shapes a sense of community and social solidarity (Sztompka, 2021, p. 272). Conversely, if universal values and norms are neglected in the accumulation of social capital, this capital assumes a "dirty" form, characterised by negative manifestations such as corruption, mafia arrangements, and nepotism. Social researchers highlight the negative manifestations of social capital released without moral principles reference within sealed groups with strong and enduring networks. Strong in-group ties, isolation from the external environment, subordination to group solidarity and loyalty, and an awareness of common interests, are exploited for criminal activities that contravene the common good of society (Działek, 2011, p. 27; Kanafa-Chmielewska, 2010, p. 241). Social capital generated within a closed group, whose members do not abide by moral rules, benefits only "fellow kins", inhibiting "outsiders", those unconnected to the group, from accessing these resources. In a closed group, only its members have the ability to use, control, and dispose of the social capital resources. The activities of groups in which the creation of social capital is disconnected from values and norms not only neglect the public interest but also jeopardise the democratic order and civil society. Well-organised and closed groups (e.g. mafia families) can exert potent

external pressures to boost their profits at the expense of other social actors (Dzwończyk, 2010, pp. 228–229; Michalewska-Pawlak, 2010, p. 188).

In the aftermath of communism in Poland, nomenclature networks, which are a negative manifestation of social capital, emerged as a societal problem, impeding the construction of civil society and the implementation of democratic standards. In the communist state, the method of appointing decision-making positions ensured that key social structure roles were occupied by individuals endorsed by the ruling party. This resulted in the formation of quasi-mafia networks, hinged on social connections, amoral familism, and nepotism. Families, social clans, and interest groups dominated significant domains of social, political, and economic life, and the network of departmental affiliations they formed served only a small fraction of the ruling party's elite (Działek, 2011, pp. 53–54; Frykowski & Starosta, 2008, p. 57) the relationships built by the nomenklatura were rooted in robust in-group ties, loyalty, and shared interests and benefits. Departmental connections provided access to confidential information, group protection and support, and were utilized to establish “dirty communities” and corrupt deals (Frykowski & Starosta, 2008, p. 57). Group members were bound more by mutual interests and loyalties than by values and moral norms. This “dirty social capital” boosted the members' compactness, their sense of group loyalty, and facilitated access to limited resources (Bartkowski, 2007, pp. 81–82). Following the fall of communism, these social pathologies were transferred to the newly emerging democratic state. The accumulated resources of “dirty social capital”, especially the nomenclature networks developed under the totalitarian regime, enabled economic success post-1989, primarily benefiting the former communist elites. After amassing wealth from national assets, these elites showed little regard for the common good of society (Ziółkowski, 2012, pp. 21–22).

From the above, it becomes clear that strong ties, efficient group networks, loyalty, solidarity, or even group trust are not sufficient conditions for the development of social capital. A critical precondition for nurturing social capital for the common good of society is the existence of moral norms and values that construct moral relationships and spaces. Such norms and values engender a cooperative climate and shape pro-social attitudes and behaviours. Additionally, these norms and values motivate a commitment to the societal common good, and not just activities targeting the benefits and interests of a small, closed group of “fellow kins”. When social capital is built on these fundamental values and norms underpinning social trust, it positively impacts civil society and fosters the growth of democracy.

Conclusion

In a liberal democracy characterised by socio-cultural pluralism, fixed moral and religious foundations that were present in traditional societies are absent. These foundations in traditional societies mandated specific attitudes and behaviours, dictated values and norms across generations, and governed social interactions, thereby forming the social structure. In a modernised society, emphasis is placed on freedom, pluralism, and tolerance, freeing the individual from the constraints of traditional values and norms. This autonomy allows the individual to perceive themselves as capable of achieving everything through their own efforts and initiatives. When an individual is focused on pursuing their own private interests and benefits, they often fail to value social virtues that facilitate interpersonal relationships. Additionally, they may undervalue the significance of cooperation and forming bonds with others. In a society that emphasises individualism, a person may not only lose their sense of purpose, worth, and sense of belonging to a community, but also grapple with feelings of loneliness and loss.

To maintain societal cohesion, ensure social order and facilitate cooperation, moral values and norms that limit individual arbitrariness are essential. Liberal states, whose functioning is subordinated to rules guaranteeing extensive individual freedom, are unable to avoid difficulties in maintaining social order unless they endorse axionormative systems regulating social relations and curb individual arbitrariness that undermines the foundations of social order. Excessive individualism, consumerism, and amoralism are becoming among the most serious challenges facing contemporary democracy. It is the universal moral norms, expressing the obligations of individuals to one another, that regulate relationships and keep unchecked ambition, privacy, consumerist attitudes, and selfish drives in check. As it is impossible for any state to legally and administratively regulate all behaviours of its citizens, moral rules recognised by societies and transmitted in the intergenerational socialisation process are of utmost importance.

These values and norms are a fundamental element of social capital, driving its development. By encouraging honest behaviour, they foster order and social stability, sustain the continuity of communities, build moral spaces, and create a sense that individuals who recognise these rules can rely on one another and cooperate for the common good. Individuals are more inclined to trust their counterparts when their actions become predictable and are grounded in well-defined rules. Moral norms, including but not limited to civic virtues such as truthfulness, honesty, diligent discharge of duties, reciprocity of relations, and proactive prevention, cultivate an atmosphere of trust and forge connections and networks. They also significantly contribute to the advancement of social

cooperation, providing assistance in times of need and enhancing the efficiency of interaction by reducing transaction costs and facilitating team initiatives. Such norms inspire associations and organisations in which individuals attain collectively determined goals and develop dispositions for activity and social self-organisation, thereby serving as a training ground for self-governance, entrepreneurship, and innovation. Communities emerge, endure, and flourish when individuals are united by mutually recognised values and moral norms. As the attachment to the moral norms collectively embraced by the community intensifies, the sense of community correspondingly strengthens. The skills and habits cultivated from public engagement, as well as the shared sense of solidarity and responsibility for the common good honed through teamwork, become catalysts for social, cultural, political, and altruistic activity. Cooperation, however, necessarily curtails the freedom of individual, selfish choices and implies renouncing one's own excessive ambitions, aspirations, and interests. It further involves nurturing dispositions for collective commitment to the common good.

The analysis reveals that the marginalisation of moral values and norms within social life detrimentally impacts the state of social capital. This attenuation of morality engenders moral relativism, individualism, consumerism, and the absolutisation of freedom. (Post)modern societies that undermine traditional axionormative systems become atomised and disorganised, and encounter difficulties in achieving common goals. Additionally, they grapple with a rise in crime and the issue of social dysfunction. All these phenomena have a detrimental impact on the state of social capital. For the survival of pluralistic societies, it is therefore essential to recognise and uphold moral values and norms, which constitute the binding agent of every community, the foundation of cooperation and a condition of social order, as well as a necessary prerequisite for the development of social capital.

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