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## Conflict as a differentiating factor in the creation of social capital among youth in Serbia and Poland

Konflikt jako czynnik różnicujący tworzenie się kapitału społecznego wśród młodych w Serbii i Polsce

**Summary:** This paper analyses how conflict impacts social capital. The existing literature suggests that the social capital of a society which has experienced conflict or military operations will not be shaped in the same way as the social capital in an area where there were no such actions. Yet, there is disagreement on what the specific effects of a conflict are. This paper seeks to address this puzzle by comparing levels of social capital in Serbia and Poland. The research presented in this paper was conducted among two groups; the first, a group of respondents including young Serbs (18-24 years old) who, during the 1990s, survived hostilities on the territory of their country or grew up surrounded by people who were participating in military actions. The second group includes young Poles (aged 18-24), who as children, grew up in a society, which from 1995-2002 did not experience either conflict or military action. Significant research results include the following: in a society in which no conflict has occurred in the past, there is a higher level of social and political participation; the formation of bridging communities, trust in social actors from outside the immediate family, trust in institutions, and a greater sense of security in the neighbourhood.

**Keywords:** Serbia, Poland, social capital, Balkans

**Streszczenie:** W artykule analizowana jest rola konfliktu w kształtowaniu kapitału społecznego. Opierając się na literaturze przedmiotu, można stwierdzić, że jeśli społeczeństwo doświadczyło konfliktu bądź działań wojennych, to w efekcie końcowym procesu kształtowania się kapitału społecznego będzie się on różnił od kapitału społecznego na obszarze, na którym takich działań nie było. Grupa badanych osób to młodzi Serbowie (18-24 lata), którzy w latach 90. przeżyli działania wojenne na terytorium swojego państwa albo wychowali się w środowisku osób uczestniczących w konflikcie oraz młodzi

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Polacy w wieku 18-24 lata wychowani w społeczeństwie, które w latach 1995-2002 nie doświadczyło konfliktu ani działań militarnych.

Istotne wyniki badań to: w społeczeństwie, w którym nie występowały w przeszłości konflikty, odnotowuje się większy poziom obywatelskości oraz tworzenia wspólnot typu *bridging*, zaufania do aktorów społecznych spoza najbliższej rodziny, zaufania do instytucji oraz większe poczucie bezpieczeństwa w okolicy. Analizując wyniki, można stwierdzić, że konflikt różnicuje kapitał społeczny w państwie.

Słowa klucze: Serbia, Polska, kapitał społeczny, konflikt, Bałkany

## Introduction

Creation of social capital is a long-lasting process<sup>1</sup>. The social, political, historical, and economic background of a country may have a significant influence on community building, and its relations with others. The existing research shows that conflicts have a strong influence on human physical and mental health<sup>2</sup>. After military action, a country is not only suffering from demographic losses but also from psychological damage, which affect the society and its functioning. The existing literature clearly shows that violence and conflict are likely to have profound effects on both individual and community levels of social capital; individuals experience conflict differently and thus their levels of social capital are likely to change<sup>3</sup>. In addition, the social capital of a community affected by violence and conflict is likely to change. Yet, there is disagreement in the existing literature on the specific effects of violence and conflict on social capital. While some authors claim that conflicts bring people closer together and increase social engagement, others argue that social bonds are negatively affected by wars and conflicts. This paper aims to tackle this puzzle by exploring the levels of social capital in two different contexts: Serbia, with its

- 1 F. Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and The Creation of Prosperity*, London 1996; R.D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone, The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York 2000; P. Sztompka, *Kapitał społeczny, teoria przestrzeni międzynarodowej*, Cracow 2016.
- 2 M. Knight, N. Loayza, D. Villanueva, *The peace dividend: Military spending cuts and economic growth*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 1577, 1996, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=615030> [12.04.2021]; D. Bar-Tal, *Introduction: Conflicts and social psychology*, [in:] *Intergroup conflicts and their resolution: Social psychological perspective*, D. Bar-Tal (ed.), Psychology Press, pp. 217-240; S. Gates et al., *Development Consequences of Armed conflict*, "World Development" 2012, no. 40(9), pp. 1713-1722.
- 3 P. Collier, A. Hoeffler, *On the incidence of civil war in Africa*, "Journal of Conflict Resolution" 2002, no. 46(1), pp. 13-28; E. Miguel, S. Shanker, E. Sergenti, *Economic shocks and civil conflict: an instrumental variables approach*, "Journal of Political Economy" 2004, no. 112(4), pp. 725-753.

history of devastating wars and deep social polarization, and Poland, which in the same period experienced peace and democratic development. The findings show that the experience of war at an early age negatively affects levels of social capital in adulthood.

## 1. Social capital and its determinants

By correlating different definitions of social capital, we can describe it as a network of positive relationships that help to combine operations, exchange resources, and attain goals for both individuals and collectivity as a whole<sup>4</sup>. Positive relationships that are based on social trust and real benefits of functioning in the collectivity are elements of social capital that have been pointed out by Lyda Judson Hannifan (1916), James Coleman (1988), Robert Putnam (2000), Francis Fukuyama (1966), and Piotr Sztompka (2016) among others.

The most common sources of social capital are trust, the level of state democratization, a prospering civil society (including membership in organizations, associations, groupings, etc.), a sense of identity in a group, positive social networks, and security. It is important to distinguish between two types of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bridging social capital is a type of social capital that is inclusive and can thereby create bonds between communities and their members. On the other hand, bonding social capital creates homogeneous groups that oppose each other, simultaneously creating antagonisms. Social capital is more valuable in communities whose public relations have the nature of bridging<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. Conflict and its impact on the young and society

The literature shows that violence and conflict are likely to have profound effects on every individual and community level of social

4 J.S. Coleman, *Foundation of Social Theory*, Cambridge 1990; R.D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone, The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York 2000; P. Dasgupta, *Trust as a commodity*, [in:] *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, D. Gambetta (ed.), Oxford 1988; P. Sztompka, *Kapitał społeczny, teoria przestrzeni międzynarodowej*, Cracow 2016.

5 X. Souza Briggs, *Doing Democracy Up Close: Culture, Power, and Communication in Community Building*, "Journal of Planning Education and Research" 1998, no. 18(1), pp. 1-13.

capital. Individuals experience conflict differently and thus their levels of social capital are likely to change<sup>6</sup>. However, the literature exploring the impact of armed conflicts on social capital shows contradictory findings. On the one hand, studies show that violence increases collective action, civic engagement, and trust in the community<sup>7</sup>, while on the other hand, studies show that the positive impact of civil war in terms of social bonds is greater on direct participants, particularly abductees and militia members, than on the rest of the society, which is negatively affected<sup>8</sup>. Hence, while researchers agree that conflict is a factor that has an influence on social capital and can affect society, there is disagreement on those effects. This puzzle is the focus of the research presented in this paper.

A conflict is an undeniably difficult situation in which there is a threat to the important interests, desires, and goals of the individuals involved. Additionally, during a conflict, social actors experience negative emotions, which significantly worsen their mental condition. During an armed conflict, life, health, material and non-material goods, social position, relationships with other people, mental balance, and other needs of an individual may be endangered. The World Health Organization estimates that in situations of armed conflict around the world “10% of people who experience traumatic events will have severe mental health problems and another 10% will develop behaviours that will limit their ability to function effectively”. The most common ones are depression, anxiety, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)<sup>9</sup>.

Armed conflict is a negative social factor for a child's health. During and immediately after a conflict, there are significant changes in social structure, norms, and roles. Children can take over the responsibilities of adults. Numerous studies have documented that childhood adversity can alter the architecture of the brain and neuroendocrine function,

6 T. Calvo et al., *Fear Not for Man? Armed conflict and social capital in Mali*, *Journal of Comparative Economics* 2020, no. 48(2), pp. 251-276.

7 Ibidem.

8 C. Blattman, *From Violence to Voting: War and Political Participation in Uganda*, *American Political Science Review* 2009, no. 103(2), pp. 231-247.

9 World Health Organization, *World health report 2001. Mental health: new understanding, new hope*, 2001, [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/42390/WHO\\_2001.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/42390/WHO_2001.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) [05.08.2022].

leading to changes in learning, behaviour, and physiology. Growing up in aggressive, stressful, and unpredictable family environments can have negative consequences for the future lives of these children. Research shows that close contact and emotional relationships with traumatized people can become a chronic stressor and family members often experience symptoms of trauma and a wide range of psychological stress<sup>10</sup>. Additionally, among families that survived a war, patterns based on the stigmatization of the enemy may be passed on. It can be concluded that conflicts have strong effects on a child's development. Based on this literature, the following sections explore the effects of conflicts on social capital, focusing on those generations in Serbia that had their formative years during the conflict.

### **3. The Serbian political and social situation from 1995-2002**

While other countries of Central and Eastern Europe witnessed democratic changes in the 1990s, Serbia was still in the grips of authoritarianism and still involved in the ethnic wars which resulted in the breakup of Yugoslavia. In the late 1980s, communist ideology was replaced by nationalism and Milošević came to power with an ultranationalist agenda – to see all Serbs in one state. By 1995, Serbia had lost the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where it pursued policies of destruction, ethnic cleansing, and aggression. By 1996, Serbia received around 560.000 refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which at the time, was the highest number of refugees in Europe. Two years later, in the country's southern province of Kosovo and Metohija, Albanian rebels started fighting back against Serb police repression, aiming to secure independence by force. When Milošević came to power, he immediately abolished all autonomy of Kosovo and placed it under the direct control of Belgrade. In the early 1990s, Albanians resisted peacefully. They were disillusioned by the exclusion of the Kosovo issue from the Dayton peace agreement which ended the war in Bosnia, so Kosovo Albani-

10 M. Krešić et al., *Psychological and Behavioral Problems in Children of War Veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*, "The European Journal of Psychiatry" 2016, no. 30(3), pp. 219-230.

ans started an armed resistance. Determined not to allow the same extent of bloodshed as in Bosnia, the international community soon intervened. After the failure of peace negotiations, the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia began in March 1999 and lasted for 78 days. Serbia surrendered and Kosovo was placed under international administration. By the end of 1999, more than 200.000 people from Kosovo were internally displaced in Serbia.

During the NATO air strikes in Kosovo, the war was still raging as the Serb-Albanian conflict turned into a full-blown ethnic conflict. Yugoslav sources claim that a total of 462 soldiers and 114 Serbian policemen were killed during the entire war. The army defending the borders with Albania and Macedonia suffered losses: 161 killed and 299 wounded. As a result of the war, 40 airmen were also killed, and 110 air defence soldiers were injured<sup>11</sup>, while according to the Yugoslav media, about 2,000 civilians died during the war, although Human Rights Watch (HRW) argues that the number of victims was around 500 citizens of Yugoslavia<sup>12</sup>. It was estimated that at the beginning of the war there were 150 air operations per day, and in May 1999 there were up to 740 of them. After 60 days of conflict, 14,000 bombs had been dropped. By 10th June 1999, 25,119 air strikes had been carried out and 600 cruise missiles had been fired. At the end of the war, attacks on civilian buildings and the facilities necessary for survival were intensified<sup>13</sup>.

For the citizens of Serbia, the '90s were years of uncertainty and fear. To discourage wars in the early 1990s, international sanctions were imposed on Yugoslavia (including visa bans, and trade and arms embargoes). The breakup of Yugoslavia combined with the sanctions, the refugee crisis, and the NATO bombings during 1999 had devastating economic consequences. Serbia experienced the highest hyperinflation in modern times. Poverty and unemployment were high, and citizens struggled with basic needs such as heat (due to power cuts and fuel shortages). During this time, the black market economy and

11 M.D. Luković, *The Kosovo crisis through the eyes of Serbs. Immediate causes, historical roots, course and consequences*, Belgrade 2000.

12 Human Rights Watch Report, [https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2000/nato/Natbm200-01.htm#P164\\_36978](https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2000/nato/Natbm200-01.htm#P164_36978) [13.08.2022].

13 P. Jastrzębski, V. Stemenković, *Humanitarna wojna*, Warsaw 2001, p. 31.

corruption flourished and survival depended heavily on political and family connections and humanitarian help<sup>14</sup>.

Reproducing the old myths about Serbs as heavenly people who, although on the side of justice, have historically been threatened, the regime mobilized nationalist sentiments and strengthened its grip. The 1990s regime was competitive authoritarian which meant that multiparty elections were regular and democratic institutions existed, but rules were often violated<sup>15</sup>. Despite massive and widespread protests against the regime, Milošević managed to remain in power for years by trying to close off all alternative channels of information, expression, and sociability<sup>16</sup>. Despite the government's effort to split and divide the opposition, the opposition parties managed to set their differences aside and unite as the Democratic Opposition of Serbia. They jointly supported a single presidential candidate for the September 2000 presidential elections. After Milošević had falsified electoral results, several hundred thousand protesters went onto the streets of Belgrade to demand Milošević's resignation and his recognition of the opposition's electoral victory. Due to public pressure, Milošević resigned. This moment marked the beginning of the democratic changes in Serbia.

## 4. The Polish political and social situation in 1995-2002

The mid-90s and early 2000s were a special period, both for Poland and the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe. Unlike Serbia, during this time most of Europe managed to break free from authoritarian power and started the process of democratization<sup>17</sup> (Avioutski, 2007: 9). Poland at that time was a work in progress of systemic, political, economic, and social transformations<sup>18</sup>. From the his-

14 R. Garfield, *Economic Sanctions, Health, and Welfare in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia 1990-2000*, OCHA, UNICEF, Belgrade 2001.

15 M. McFaul, *Transitions from Post-Communism*, "Journal of Democracy" 2005, no. 16(3), pp. 5-19; N. Vladisavljević, *Competitive authoritarianism and popular protest: Evidence from Serbia under Milošević*, "International Political Science Review" 2016, no. 37(1), pp. 36-50.

16 E.D. Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.

17 V. Avioutski, *Aksamitne rewolucje*, Warszawa 2007, p. 11.

18 P. Pluciński, *Debt and crisis: Socio-economic critique of neoliberal transformation in Poland*, "The Economic and Labour Relations Review" 2020, no. 31(2), pp. 211-229.



torical point of view, Poland achieved great success in the process of changes by managing to transform into the new system in a very short period of time, furthermore, these revolutionary changes turned out to be permanent. Polish society witnessed Poland joining international organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), World Trade Organization (WTO), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the European Union. Poland reasserted its position in the international arena as an independent and sovereign state.

This period of transformation was a period of systemic and political change in Poland. A democratically elected political grouping came to power and, for the first time in Poland, plurality voting took place and Poland could experience “complete democracy”. At the same time, plenty of changes were introduced such as the adoption of a new constitution on 2 April 1997, and the unification of law in accordance with the law functioning within the European Union.

Joining the European Union was rudimentary, equally for the economy of the state as for the satisfaction of the society<sup>19</sup>. Already in April 1994, Poland submitted a formal request for accession to the European Union and in 1997, the European Council decided to begin accession negotiations with Poland and four other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. At the time, Poland was included in the financial assistance program PHARE (Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring Their Economies) which was providing funds to help with the transformation, investment, regional development, and, among others, human capital. The Phare programme allocated 2.050 million Euro to Poland during the period 1990-1999<sup>20</sup>. During the period from 2000 to 2006, pre-accession aid to the candidate countries was more than doubled. Alongside the previously mentioned Phare programme, Poland received benefits from aid for agricultural and rural development (SAPARD) and a structural instrument (ISPA), which gave priority to measures similar to those of the cohesion fund in environment

19 A. Visvizi, A. Matysek-Jędrych, A. Mroczek-Dąbrowska, *Introduction – Poland and the 30 years of transition (1989-2019)*, [in:] *Poland in the Single Market: Politics, economics, the euro*, A. Visvizi, A. Matysek-Jędrych, A. Mroczek-Dąbrowska (eds.), Milton Park, 2020.

20 Regular report from the Commission on Poland towards accession, [http://oide.sejm.gov.pl/oide/images/files/dokumenty/regular\\_report\\_1999.pdf](http://oide.sejm.gov.pl/oide/images/files/dokumenty/regular_report_1999.pdf) [19.11.2020].



and transport<sup>21</sup>. And yet, the transformation process was a difficult period for Poland. The unemployment rate was one of the highest in the history of the country, debt was growing, and GDP was decreasing<sup>22</sup>. However, when Poland opened the market to foreign investors and became a member of international organizations, this stabilized the Polish economy. Financial help was not the only factor which gave both the citizens and the Polish elites the unjustified hope that Polish politics and the functioning of the political system would become more organized. Also, the perspective of European integration was important. Positive democratic experiences for EU countries generated expectations to go through the difficult period of socio-economic transformation quickly and painlessly. The high level of social support for integration was connected not only with the obvious expected benefits (social, economic, and political) but also with the symbolic sense of historical justice coming back to the European family<sup>23</sup>.

The moment of Poland's transformation and its strengthening in the international arena was also a time when society changed. Based on CBOS research, the initial period of the systemic transformation contributed to a sharp decline in the sense of security in the country, but after 2001 it grew considerably and stayed on that level<sup>24</sup>. It can be said that, although the Poles initially felt some uncertainty, later they gained confidence and thus a sense of security. The research on the level of satisfaction among Poles shows that initially, very few Poles declared a sense of well-being, but in 2002 CBOS noted a significant increase in the sense of satisfaction with life<sup>25</sup>.

21 Ibidem.

22 P. Pluciński, *Debt and crisis: Socio-economic critique of neoliberal transformation in Poland*, "The Economic and Labour Relations Review" 2020, no. 31(2), pp. 211-229.

23 A. Turska-Kawa, *Religious Determinants of Socio-Political Openness of Young Silesians in Poland*, "Polish Political Science Yearbook" 2020, no. 49(1), pp. 85-100.

24 *Opinie o bezpieczeństwie narodowym 2014*, CBOS, [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2014/K\\_018\\_14.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2014/K_018_14.PDF) [18.08.2022].

25 *Samopoczucie Polaków w 2001*, CBOS, 2001, [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2002/K\\_008\\_02.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2002/K_008_02.PDF) [18.08.2022].

## 5. Research model

The aim of this article is to compare the results of research into the social capital in Serbia and Poland among young people aged 18 to 24. Taking into account that the key to human development and shaping is during the youngest years and that social capital is shaped through a long-term process, we argue that the events in 1995-2002 in Serbia and Poland significantly impacted differences in the way social capital was shaped in these two countries. The conflict which took place in Serbia and on the territory of the former Yugoslav republics was a significant factor that shaped the approach of society to issues such as political and social participation, cooperation, and a sense of security, identity, and trust. At that time, society in Poland was strengthening its international position and emerging from a powerful economic and social crisis despite struggling with the difficulties of transformation. During this period, Poles felt a growing sense of security and life satisfaction. Therefore, we expect that the level of social capital in Poland will be significantly different from the one in Serbia.

Different parts of social capital, such as trust, security, and social and political participation, were taken into account in this research. Trust is interpreted as a kind of bet in which individuals correctly predict future actions towards themselves and other people. We can distinguish between interpersonal trust and public confidence. Interpersonal trust is an individual's approach to other social actors based on the assumption that they are marked by honest and cooperative behaviour based on commonly set norms. Public confidence is, however, determined by the attitude of a citizen toward the institutions and organizations, in which interactions are conditioned and legitimized by a set of structures. A sense of security is also an important component of social capital. Security lies in the sphere of basic human needs<sup>26</sup> and the hierarchy of existential values<sup>27</sup>. It is an objectified state of non-threat, integrally related to the subjective and emotional perception of space as safe, or a sense of security. There is a feedback loop between security and social trust; if we feel safe in our immediate

26 A. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, New York 1954.

27 S.H. Schwartz, *An Overview of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values*, "Online Readings in Psychology and Culture" 2012, no. 2(1), DOI: 10.9707/2307-0919.1116.

environment and in the country, it is easier for us to build social networks based on trust and collective involvement in social and public life. We also took into account the issue of social and political participation because social capital is a form of social and political participation and at the same time it shows the ability to create a network of civic, social, and political involvement. It is also about affiliation and the creation of social groups, communities, and collectivities that take part in the redistribution of power to its individual levels, referred to as civic Network nodes, that exist thanks to the correlation, which can take various forms, but boil down to the function of the channel of transfer or flow of resources, which can be both tangible (money and other goods) and intangible, such as the transfer of knowledge and support<sup>28</sup>.

The study puts forward three main hypotheses:

- First hypothesis. A society that has experienced conflict tends to form bonding communities (closed groups) and only create positive capital among them, while a society that has not experienced a conflict situation will more often form bridging groups (open communities) that will be beneficial to society as a whole.
- Second hypothesis. Conflict and trauma among the youngest affect the social capital of adult citizens. In this case, the conflict situation, or the lack of it, will differentiate society in terms of the level of social and political participation, sense of security, and citizens' trust in each other and public institutions. It is predicted that conflict will negatively affect the indicators of social capital.
- Third (main) hypothesis. Conflict has a significant impact on the process of the formation of social capital in society. It is predicted that conflict and military action will have a negative impact on the shaping of social capital in a society and thus will differ in Poland and Serbia.

28 P. Bourdieu, *Le capital social*, "Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales" 1980, no. 31, pp. 2-3; P. Bourdieu, J.P. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, "The School Review" 1990, vol. 86, no. 1, pp. 144-147; N. Lin, K.S. Cook, R.S. Burt, *Social Capital: Theory and Research*, New York 2001.

## 6. Research Methodology

The results presented in this article are part of a survey that explored social capital in the former republics of Yugoslavia. The research was executed in the form of a questionnaire between December 2019 and December 2020. In Serbia, the study was conducted on 385 randomly selected respondents aged 18 to 24 years, including 101 men and 284 women. The survey was conducted in large cities such as Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Niš as well as in small towns such as Čačak and Zaječar. The survey was carried out in person and as an internet questionnaire with invitations to participate sent by email and posted on Facebook groups (groups for students, hobbyists, associations etc.). In Poland, due to the pandemic situation, the survey was conducted entirely online. The questionnaires were sent to various groups and forums on Facebook, LinkedIn, and by e-mail to universities and schools all over Poland. In the case of Poland, 318 respondents, including 115 men and 203 women, took part in the research. The questionnaire was divided into four parts: social and political activity, identity, trust in people from the immediate environment, and confidence in institutions. The survey consisted of 17 questions. Most of the questions used the Likert scale which employs a 5-point scale: *I strongly disagree, I disagree, I have no opinion, I agree, I strongly agree.*

In this article, social capital was operationalized by the following components: interpersonal and public trust; social and political participation; the sense of security in the immediate vicinity, and in the country. In order to compare the mean of the two groups, a Mann-Whitney U test was used, which is a non-parametric test to evaluate the differences between the means in the two groups. To study the relationships between variables, Spearman's rank coefficients were used. The goal of the above-mentioned methods is to outline the relationship between conflict and social capital in detail, taking into account the dimensions of the variables. The research was analysed in the SPSS program.

## 7. Results

In order to compare the means in Serbia and Poland, a wide array of tests was used, including the Mann-Whitney U test and Spearman's rank coefficients. Based on the analysis of the obtained research results, we can draw the following conclusions:

- **Trust.** Young people, both in Poland and Serbia, showed high levels of trust in their immediate family (parents, children, spouse). The inhabitants of Poland declared significantly greater trust in the people they work with on a daily basis and in people who work voluntarily in their place of residence. However, the inhabitants of Serbia expressed significantly higher trust in their friends and extended family. Although both countries showed very low public trust, Polish residents declared significantly greater trust in local authorities, trade unions, the army, courts, newspapers, public administration officials, police, radio, and social media. Serbian respondents expressed significantly greater trust in the government and the church. Young Polish and Serbian residents both showed very low confidence in politicians and television.
- **Social and political participation.** A significantly higher result of local participation and participation in public life was achieved among Polish residents than among young Serbians. A particularly significant difference, but also greater commitment, can be seen in the case of public participation of young Poles. In the case of Polish residents, all indicators of social and political participation correlated with each other. That is because the more often they believe that they are free to express themselves in public, the more often they participate in local life and are able to help others or participate politically. The same conclusion can be drawn among young Serbs.
- **Sense of security.** The inhabitants of Poland achieved a significantly higher indicator of the sense of security in the immediate vicinity, while among the inhabitants of Serbia, a significantly higher result of the feeling of security in the state was observed. However, no significant differences were found in the individual sense of security between the inhabitants of Poland and Serbia.

## 8 Discussion

● The aim of the presented study was a multi-level comparison of social capital in Poland and Serbia. In order to determine social capital in a given society, we specified the level of its components as follows: interpersonal and public trust, social and political participation, and

a sense of security. Based on research, evidence shows that the condition of Serbian society was shaped through the prism of the war related to the break-up of Yugoslavia (1991-1995) and the Kosovo war (1998-1999). During these conflicts, many people, including children, experienced negative emotions which had an influence on important interests, desires, and goals. Long-term contact with cruelty, aggression, violence, and suffering as well as large-scale corruption and growing authoritarianism had a significant impact on the mental condition of Serbians<sup>29</sup>. However, at the same time, children in Poland experienced peace and a lack of any conflict situation. Both studied groups differ in terms of interpersonal and public trust, sense of security, and social and political participation. Analysing the results of this research enabled confirmation of a significant part of the hypotheses.

A society that has experienced conflict tends to form bonding communities (closed groups) and only create positive capital among them, while a society that has not experienced conflict often forms bridging groups (open communities) that are beneficial to society as a whole. Poles have greater trust in people outside their circle of family and close friends. Because of this, they are able to collaborate and form bridging communities. In this case, trust is the part that binds the community together. Young people in Poland, unlike young people in Serbia, have not experienced conflict or grown up in a post-conflict environment. They have the predisposition to create social groups of the bridging type. Thus, these communities are focused on cooperation and transferring social capital, so that the whole of society can benefit from it. On the other hand, we have young Serbs who trust only the closest members of the community. Thus a conflict situation in the state could create grounds for trusting only the closest members of the community, which in this case, is family. Therefore, Serbs are more likely to create closed communities of the bonding type, in which capital is less likely to penetrate the wider society, which contributes to the worse state of social capital in their country. It is harder to build capital for the whole of society when society creates groups of trust among relatives and family and does not show trust in people from the wider neighbourhood, work, and other social actors.

29 R. Garfield, *op. cit.*; P. Jastrzębski, V. Stemenković, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

In the course of the analysis, it was possible to confirm the hypothesis that conflict negatively affects the indicators of social capital. In a society where there have been no conflicts in the past (as in the case of Poland), a greater level of social and political participation is noted, which manifests itself in participation at both local and state levels. More frequent participation in social and political life indicates at the same time a higher level of social and political socialization in society. This means that young Poles more often undertake joint activities for the good of the community or to solve specific problems which transfer into results such as democracy, institutional agency, and social cohesion. Young Serbs obtained significantly worse results because of the experience of conflict or traumatic situations. The results of the survey have also shown that the inhabitants of Poland feel safer than the Serbs in their immediate surroundings. This is an important issue because security as a basic need and value is an important component of creating networks based on trust and a sense of community. Serbs feel less safe in their immediate surroundings. This could be influenced by a conflict that disturbed their sense of security in their childhood and had a significant impact on modern life. Both Poles and Serbs trust their closest family (parents, children, spouses) the most. However, it is Poles who have greater trust in business partners, colleagues, further friends, and greater trust in the authorities and public institutions. Trust is critical to social capital in a society. Both social trust and trust in the authorities and public institutions are important, as it reduces the costs of transferring resources in society and may affect both the economy of the state and the condition of society and the so-called civil society.

Moreover, the results show that the conflict significantly influenced Serbian society as well as the process of shaping the social capital in Serbia. The process of socialization was different for children who experienced conflict or were brought up in such an environment. Research has shown that currently, young Serbs differ from Poles in terms of shaping their social networks, local and state participation, interpersonal and institutional trust, and a sense of security. It can be concluded that when we deal with a conflict situation during the process of social capital formation, it will have a negative impact on the state of social capital in the future.



The surprising result is that Serbs expressed a significantly higher level of feeling safe in their state. It is expected that a society that has experienced armed conflict will have a lower feeling of security in every aspect. There can be many reasons for this. Both countries experience growing polarization in their society, anti-government protests, and dissatisfaction with the political scene<sup>30</sup>. Surely, growing unrest in society may have an impact on the sense of security of both Serbs and Poles in the state. For young Poles, an increasingly divided society is a difficult situation. Social unrest creates the feeling of helplessness and a lack of influence on events in the state, and thus reduces the sense of security in Poland. On the other hand, in Serbia, it could be expected that a sense of security is related to the recent experience of war, i.e., a current lack of perceived external security threats.

Despite the fact that young Poles show much greater public trust, it is interesting that the inhabitants of Poland declared significantly lower trust in the government in comparison to Serbs. It can be assumed that this is also influenced by the current situation in the country. In both countries, the strong power of the ruling party, numerous corruption scandals, and generational differences regarding the worldview increase social discontent. In Poland, for young people who grew up in a state and at a time where there was no conflict, the current situation may cause anxiety and fear, and thus they lose confidence in the institutions that exercise power. On the other hand, in Serbia's servile and authoritarian political culture, the strongman in power is associated with stability<sup>31</sup>.

The less surprising, yet still interesting, results concerned confidence in the church. Young Serbian citizens expressed significantly greater trust in the church than young Poles. This is typical for the region of the Balkan Peninsula where religion is an important element

30 A. Birešev, *Protest protiv diktature i konstrukcija kolektivnog identiteta*, "Sociologija" 2017, no. 59 (4), pp. 389-404; G. Pudar Draško, I. Fiket, J. Vasiljević, *Big dreams and small steps: comparative perspectives on the social movement struggle for democracy in Serbia and North Macedonia*, "South-east European and Black Sea Studies" 2020, no. 20(1), pp. 199-219; D. Urzędowska, J. Suchomska, *Feministki w sieci. Nowe media w działaniach przeciwko ograniczeniu praw kobiet w Polsce*, "Dyskurs & Dialog" 2020, no. 2, pp. 9-23.

31 Z. Stojiljković, *Potencijali za promene: Ogledi o sindikatima, civilnom društvu i strategijama promena*, Univerzitet u Beogradu, Fakultet političkih nauka, Beograd 2019.

influencing the formation of national identity<sup>32</sup>. However, in Poland, there is a decline in trust in the institution of the church. These results are confirmed by other studies conducted in Poland among citizens. According to IBRIS research, trust in the church in Poland dropped by as much as 13.1% in two years<sup>33</sup>. Less and less trust in church institutions may be caused by the recent events related to the tightening of the anti-abortion law. The Church approved the tightening of the already restrictive law while the majority of society does not agree with it. Additionally, trust may have been influenced by the scandal over cases of paedophilia in the church in Poland that have not been settled. Moreover, the Polish church has been closely associated with the state for many years<sup>34</sup>. Currently, it represents the same values as the ruling party, which may significantly affect the trust among the part of society that does not share these values.

Young people assimilate the hierarchy of values of a given society in the course of socialization, through the influence of an individual on society and vice versa. This process is especially relevant to the early stages of a child's development. Thanks to socialization, individuals learn socially accepted ways of directing their impulses and satisfying their needs, master communication skills, and shape their ways of feeling and expressing emotions. In addition, as this article has shown, young people shape their citizenship, trust, sense of security, and social networks, and thus the capital of the entire society. The process of creating social capital is influenced by many factors, one of which is the situation of a social conflict or an armed conflict. The conflict, and at the same time its intensity, affects the attitudes of young people; how they will participate publicly and socially, how they will create their own social networks, whether they will feel safe, and will they trust each other.

Social capital is very important for the community and the state. Communities in which individuals participate socially and political-

32 I. Čolović, *Śmierć na Kosowym Polu, historia mitu kosowskiego*, Sejny 2020; T. Stryjek, *Współczesna Serbia i Chorwacja wobec własnej historii*, Warsaw 2020.

33 IBRIS, *Sondaż IBRIS dla Onetu: którym instytucjom Polacy ufają najbardziej?*, Onet Wiadomości, 2020, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/sondaz-ktorym-instytucjom-ufaja-polacy-pytamy-o-policje-kosciol-ue-tk-rzad-i-sady/swnt7mn> [17.03.2021].

34 A. Turska-Kawa, W. Wojtasik, *Directiveness as a Predictor of Religious Attitudes*, "Polish Sociological Review" 2017, no. 2, pp. 189-201.

ly, feel safe, help each other, create communities based on trust, bear lower costs, and thus function better. Social capital is shaped through a long process, therefore, research on the factors influencing its differentiation seems to be important. The literature on the subject and this research clearly show that violence and conflict have a profound impact on all levels of community social capital. However, the multitude of studies in the literature presented in this dissertation shows that the authors are not unanimous in their opinion as to how conflict and its intensity affect a given community by differentiating its social capital. Therefore, in this research, an attempt was made to demonstrate these relationships, focusing primarily on social trust in other members of communities, bridging identities, and the creation of open groups, because only then can social capital bring tangible benefits to the entire society. These observations seem to be particularly important at a time when we are dealing with an armed attack by Russia on Ukraine and the beginning of a war in this region. The high intensity of the armed conflict may have a large impact on the social capital in Ukraine. Researchers should focus on monitoring this situation so that in the future it would be possible to rebuild the components of the community and civil society more efficiently.

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**Table 1. Interpersonal trust**

	Poland	Serbia	Mann-Whitney U test	p
Most people can be trusted	2.43	2.29	56750.5	.184
Trust in business partners generally pays off	3.30	2.80	42191.5	.000*

**Table 2. Interpersonal Trust**

I trust:	Poland	Serbia	Mann-Whitney U test	p
my immediate family – parents, children, spouse	4.48	4.60	56040.0	.066
my friends, extended family	3.79	4.02	52389.0	.001*
people with whom I work on a daily basis	3.24	3.03	53224.5	.006*
my neighbours	2.62	2.61	59818.0	.920
voluntary workers in my place of residence	2.75	2.58	54743.0	.032*

Source: own study based on research.

**Table 3. Public trust**

	Poland	Serbia	Mann-Whitney U test	p
Local authority	2.83	1.77	30089.5	.000*
Unions	2.73	2.03	38296.0	.000*
Army	3.27	2.82	48252.0	.000*
Courts	2.68	2.20	46131.0	.000*
Government	1.58	1.76	52720.0	.002*
Press	2.15	1.65	43571.0	.000*
Public administration officials	2.54	1.79	36297.5	.000*
Church	2.06	2.62	46184.5	.000*
Politics	1.54	1.45	57194.0	.193
Police	2.92	2.35	43965.5	.000*
Television	1.79	1.71	57382.0	.268
Radio	2.31	2.09	53494.5	.010*
Social media	2.55	2.32	52908.0	.005*

Source: own study based on research.

**Table 4. Social and political participation**

	Poland	Serbia	Mann-Whitney U test	p
Expressing yourself in public	2.87	2.92	57254.0	.277
Local participation	3.04	2.87	53223.5	.009*
Helping others	3.86	3.80	56533.5	.177
Participating in public life	3.91	2.69	26347.0	.000*

**Table 5. Sense of security**

	Poland	Serbia	Mann-Whitney U test	p
Individual security	3.61	3.56	58330.0	.508
A sense of security in the immediate vicinity	3.83	3.55	47943.0	.000*
A sense of security in the state	2.54	2.81	51043.5	.001*