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TRANSMUTATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY INTO NETWORK SOCIETY A CHALLENGE FOR CREATING SECURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Abstract

A democratic state requires the existence of a civil society based on active citizens associated in numerous grassroots non-governmental organizations. The changes that took place at the turn of the 20th and 21st century in the field of digital technology, especially the development of the Internet and the high level of computerization, have practically affected all areas of life of people, countries and international organizations. They also did not remain without influence on the functioning of society, in terms of its activity for the common good. The aim of the article is to present the process of transformation of civil society into a network society, together with the characteristics of those factors that have given rise to change in the nature of social activity of citizens. It also outlines the types of threats that can be identified in the network society in the area of security, and presents ways to act for the public interest in cyberspace. The conclusions suggest that the virtual world not only allows social participation, but thanks to the global network of the Internet, contributes to the internationalization of many social issues.

Keywords: civil society, network society, Internet, challenges, security.

PRZEKSZTAŁCENIE SPOŁECZEŃSTWA OBYWATELSKIEGO W SPOŁECZEŃSTWO SIECIOWE WYZWANIEM DLA TWORZENIA BEZPIECZEŃSTWA W XXI WIEKU

Abstrakt

Warunkiem demokratycznego państwa jest istnienie społeczeństwa obywatelskiego, którego fundamentem są aktywni obywatele, zrzeszeni w licznych, oddolnie tworzonych organizacjach pozarządowych. Zmiany, które zaszły na przełomie wieku XX i XXI w obszarze technologii cyfrowej, zwłaszcza rozwój Internetu oraz wysoki poziom komputeryzacji wpłynął na praktycznie wszystkie

plaszczyny życia ludzi, państw i organizacji międzynarodowych. Nie pozostały one również bez wpływu na funkcjonowanie społeczeństwa, w aspekcie jego aktywności na rzecz dobra wspólnego. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie procesu przekształcenia społeczeństwa obywatelskiego w społeczeństwo sieci, wraz z charakterystyką tych czynników, które miały wpływ na zmianę charakteru aktywności społecznej obywateli. Wskazano również rodzaje zagrożeń, które można zidentyfikować w społeczeństwie sieciowym w obszarze bezpieczeństwa oraz przedstawiono sposoby działań na rzecz interesu publicznego w cyberprzestrzeni. W konkluzjach sformułowano wniosek końcowy, że wirtualny świat nie tylko pozwala na społeczną partycypację, ale dzięki globalnej sieci internetowej, pozwala na umiędzynarodowienie wielu kwestii społecznych.

Słowa kluczowe: społeczeństwo obywatelskie, społeczeństwo sieci, Internet, wyzwania, bezpieczeństwo.

Introduction

Democracy is one of the core values of the European Union whose development is supported by EU countries around the world. Studies of the democracy index conducted since 2006 by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 167 countries around the world indicate that in 2020 there were 23 fully democratic countries, representing 13.8% of all countries surveyed (in 2015 there were 20, representing 12%) [17]. What is more, 2020 was a time when there a significant decline took place in the democracy index as compared to previous years. As many as 116 of the 167 countries surveyed recorded a decline in this indicator compared to 2019 [3]. The likely cause was the global Coronavirus pandemic, which forced the implementation (in both democratic and non-democratic states) of diverse sanitary restrictions, such as quarantine and social distancing and lockdown.

All of these restrictions were primarily aimed at personal and civil liberties and were intended to inhibit the growth of SARS-CoV-2 infections. At the same time, in connection with the compulsory stay at home, a significant increase in the use of the Internet could be observed, which dominated human functioning in such areas as communication, and successfully penetrated also other spheres of human life and work. In such a way the processes resulting from the transformation of civil society into a network society deepened, which has become a determinant of many challenges that should be faced by the modern state and society, including also in the area of security.

The purpose of this article is to characterize the changes that have occurred over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in civil society, which, due to the ongoing digital revolution has taken on the characteristics of a network society. Due to the vastness of the topic, the research was focused on selected aspects of this process, including security aspects and challenges in this area that arise from changes in the object of our research.

Research problems, to which answers were sought, were contained in the main question: how have computerization and widespread access to the Internet influenced the transformation of civil society into a network society and whether it is

characterized by? As well as in specific questions: which factors have contributed to the decline of civic activity in democratic countries? In the digital revolution we are experiencing, are there any other forms of citizen activism for the common good, such as digital activism? What challenges to the creation of security does the process of societal transformation bring?

In an attempt to answer these questions, the authors argue that today's civil society significantly differs from the one a few decades ago. The activity of this society takes place in cyberspace, using the Internet, which makes it possible to satisfy the majority of informational, cultural, social, commercial, business and official needs. The digital involvement of its users is also expressed in fundamental issues important to the community at large, including in the area of security. However, these changes imply certain challenges that should be taken into account in the process of its organization.

In solving the research aim and research problems formulated in this way, interdisciplinary research methods were applied, including an analysis and synthesis of the literature related to the subject to allow the systematization of issues related to the subject of the study; induction and deduction, which enabled logical interpretation of research results and drawing conclusions to formulate conclusions. Given the theoretical and empirical nature of the paper, its theoretical part is based primarily on Alexander de Tocqueville's reflections on society – the precursor of research on civil society, as well as works of Ralf Dahrendorf and Francis Fukuyama who made significant contributions to the development of theory on politics, society and democracy, and also Manuel Castells, the author of the concept of network society. The empirical layer makes use of statistical data collected during national and European research on the condition of social capital and the strategy of its development, as well as the level of computerization of Polish society over the recent years.

Civil society – the phenomenon of citizens' activity

One of the characteristic features of the democratic system is the civic activity, often called the salt of democracy [29, p. 15–16]. In countries with this system citizens, together with NGOs established by them, form a civil society. This concept returned to the political language in the 80s and 90s of the twentieth century thanks to political scientists. It is considered that Aristotle is precursor of civil society and his concept of “polis” contained elements of a classical model of civil society” [1, p. 390].

A different variant of civil society was presented by the founders of liberalism (A. Smith, J. Locke) [35, p. 128–129], with the first person to systematically and thoroughly study its essence being the French politician and historian, precursor of the sociology of politics A. de Tocqueville. He is the founder of the so-called

sociological model of civil society, in which he distinguished the concept of civil society, understood as an area of mutual relations between citizens, from political society, that is, the relationship that exists between the central and federal government and citizens. Observing the American society, A. de Tocqueville wrote: If anyone in this country has an idea for improving the conditions of life, if only by building a school, a hospital or a road, he does not think of turning to politicians, he tries to make his idea more public, appeals to individuals to support his plans and tries to overcome all difficulties together with them” [28, p. 27]. On the basis of his own observations and experiences, A. de Tocqueville described the phenomenon of the American ability to organize for joint ventures.

The conclusions that A. de Tocqueville drew by observing the self-organization of American society have become the foundation in the modern perception of the role of society in the state. The passage of time not only positively verified his observations, but also confirmed the thesis that people with their innate energy order the fields of social action, and that state interference should be kept to a minimum.

A broad and slightly different perspective on civil society was expressed by F. Fukuyama who states that civil society is “(...) a complex network of intermediary institutions that includes economic organizations, voluntary associations, environmental institutions, clubs, trade unions, media, charities and churches, and in turn it is based on the family” [19, p. 4–5]. In outlining the advantages of a civil society organized to meet social needs that the state is unable or unwilling to meet, one cannot also overlook the weaknesses and frailties of democratic systems and institutions.

Considering the weaknesses of the democratic system, political scientists point out the constant negative features of democracy, such as slowness of action, frequent conflicts between political forces [24, p. 106], in some cases the instability of the executive power, its weakness and susceptibility to corruption and violation of human rights [19, p. 4–5].

Another problem of modern democracy is the disappearance of public trust [12], without which democracy does not work. This decline is due to the widespread “disease of lies”, which in the hands of people in power, champions and stars of sports, television, cinema becomes a real “weapon of mass destruction”. Democracy has always been threatened by lies, but contemporary society is particularly sensitive to its various manifestations, especially since the accessibility and anonymity of the Internet create special opportunities. Therefore, lying destroys faith in success, achievements, records, but also promises, motivation and results. Hence, the distrust of societies, which no longer believe in the assurances of all elites – political, business, media - keeps constantly increasing. The credibility of politicians, business people and public figures must be based on the principle of transparency, which is inevitably linked with the principle of accountability for their actions or decisions to those affected by them. Because of the social impact, these principles should be particularly emphasized in the legislative and executive branches.

Along with the crisis of social trust in modern democracies, a crisis of trust in the ability of states has also been noted [22, p. 194]. It is associated with such factors as: the crisis of the welfare state unable to cope with overextended and bureaucratic social programs; the development crisis, which means that one in five people in the world live in extreme poverty; and the global environmental crisis.

When analyzing the problems of the state, R. Dahrendorf confirms that they arise from the crisis of the welfare state, which is unable to provide equal social care to all, and "(...) from the passivity of people who do not want to take the initiative to do anything new, and focus on protecting what they have" [14, p. 135].

Passivity of citizens in a democratic state is a significant problem, associated with the disappearance of social capital, which can be defined as a network of mutual trust-based interpersonal ties along with shared beliefs, ethical norms, universal Christian values, a common tradition and a common cultural heritage [33]. Literature distinguishes two basic types of social capital: associational and informal. The former includes voluntary and regular participation in the activities of organizational structures intended to achieve goals of a supra-individual nature, i.e., in broadly defined non-governmental organizations. On the other hand, the second one - informal - is based on private ties, which include relationships between family members and neighbours, friends and acquaintances [8]. Another classification distinguishes two types of social capital: binding capital (functioning within closed circles of social contacts, mainly limited to family members and acquaintances) and the so-called bridging capital (referring to relationships and contacts between members of different groups and communities) [37].

Consequently, the low level of social capital should be considered as one of the most serious developmental barriers that affect diverse aspects of the life of the state and society, ranging from the low level of innovation of the country to the sense of security in the place of residence. In this context, the low level of associative capital, which enables cooperation and collaboration on a scale wider than family and neighbourhood, should be considered particularly acute. It is of particular importance, as it directly relates to the number of non-governmental organizations operating in a given area, whose members are not related by blood, but work towards a common goal.

Hence, moving on to the analysis of the level of association of the Polish society in voluntary, grassroots social organizations, we can generalize that it is not satisfactory, and furthermore is not optimistic in the long term. What facts support this thesis? Based on statistical data collected by European research centres (European Social Survey – ESS) and Polish ones (Centre for Social Opinion Research – CBOS, Central Statistical Office – CSO), it can be concluded that the involvement of the Poles in social activities and voluntary work is systematically decreasing from year to year.

According to the CSO research, between 2010 and 2018, the increase in the number of registered NGOs was only 10%, while the number of members of these entities decreased by more than 12% [8].

The activity of volunteers does not fill with optimism either. Their activity is particularly visible in two age groups – pre-working age and post-working age. As for the former variable (young people aged 15 and over), there were 10, 3% volunteers in 2011, while in 2016 their number dropped to 8.5%. According to a report developed by the Organization for Cooperation and Development, which brings together 35 highly developed countries from around the world, this points to a directly negligible involvement of Polish citizens in social activity. Based on comparative data, it was estimated that the level of participation of young Poles (15–29 years) in volunteering amounted to 9%, which is clearly far from the average for 27 EU countries amounting to 24% [26]. On the other hand, in the group of people between 55 and 64 years of age, in 2011 the rate of involvement in volunteering was 10.2%, to drop to 8.4% in 2016 [10].

Therefore, a thesis may be formulated that we are facing a crisis of the two most important pillars of social activity, including volunteering. The first one applies to the group of young people who are full of enthusiasm, ideas and readiness to provide selfless help and support. The second one, in the group of people who are nearing the end of their professional life, but are still physically, intellectually and emotionally fit enough to use their potential to build a civil society.

At this point it is worth citing the results of yet another comparative study, executed by the Centre for Democracy and Civil Society at Georgetown University in Washington. The Centre has developed a cumulative index of civic participation, which measures the participation of citizens in 12 types of organizations in 20 countries. Poland holds the last position in this study and the index value for Poland (13 points) is much lower than that in the UK (53 points), Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Germany (52 points each), lower than in Hungary (22 points) and Portugal (19 points), and slightly lower than in Greece (14 points) [31].

Concluding reflections in this part of the article, we can summarize that the idea of civil society in the traditional formula (20th century), which had been dominated by numerous non-governmental organizations with active members and volunteers, is beginning to lose its attractiveness. Despite the declaration of the majority of the Polish society (81%) that more can be achieved by acting together, fewer than 20% of the citizens seem to be involved in actions for the common good, and nearly 72% of adult Poles are not active in any NGO [10]. As compared to other European countries, the situation of Poland in this matter should be considered as unfavourable, and the indicators of civic activity and social trust as one of the lowest in Europe [18].

Information society as an effect of the digital revolution

Already in the first decade of the 21st century in social sciences appeared the category of a world community, linked together by complex relations of economic, business, cultural or family ties [36, p. 25], with clearly visible features of an information society. It is the next stage of social development in the 1970s, which involved the transition from production, and therefore mass production of goods, to the production and transmission of information. The industrial society has hence become transformed into a post-industrial society. This society is characterized by employment in the service sector, a shift from mass production to the production of goods for the individual customer. With the development of information and treating it as a specific material good, post-industrial society assumed the characteristic features of information society, in which the demand for information, understood as: to inform about something, to communicate something; a message, a hint, an instruction [30], has rapidly increased and remains at a still high level.

The term “information society” as such was first used in the 1960s in Japan. It is generally considered that the Japanese sociologist T. Umesamo is its author, who coined it in one of his works in 1963, and later on it has been popularized by another Japanese – K. Koyama in the 1970s [32, p. 81–82]. There the first “Plan for the establishment of an information society as a national goal for the year 2000” was developed, which assumed a comprehensive computerization of the country that would lead to the intellectual development of the state and the creation of knowledge. Over a short time period the idea of information society has spread throughout the world in particular thanks to the widespread use of the Internet and the development of services related to the transmission, processing and storage of information.

In Europe the concept of information society appeared in 1978, when it was discussed by Simon Nora and Alain Minc in their report on trends in the development of social systems. The European Union itself became interested in the term in the 1990s [32, p. 81–82]. Also in the United States in the 1980s work began on the development of the new concept, which quickly gained supporters. It was then that the U.S. economic community drew attention to the consequences of the development of information and communication technologies for the U.S. economy. Fritz Machlup’s work “The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in United States” published in 1962 contributed to its popularity. In later publications he stated: “that already in the mid-1960s more than 50% of American GDP was produced by people employed in the service industry, which deals with the production, distribution and processing of information” [16, p. 61]. Machlup’s works have influenced the theoretical foundations of building the information society in the United States. They became an inspiration for the works of Mark Porat

and Michael Rubin, Daniel Bell, Peter Drucker, or Manuel Castells whose theory of network society we will refer to later in this article.

The information society is characterized by a highly developed sector of modern services, such as banking, finance, telecommunications, information technology, research and development and management. In some countries over 80% of professionally active population works in this sector, with fewer than 20% of people remaining in traditional sectors. In addition, there is a progressive decentralization of society and an increase in the importance of local communities, a high level of involvement in society and functional media literacy in society and the basis of the economy on knowledge [32, p. 81–82].

Authors studying this issue point out the following: “The most significant feature of new technologies, which underlie the emergence of the information society, is undoubtedly their interactivity. The most important role among interactive media today is played by the Internet. Modern man, whether he wants it or not, is dependent on computers, which radically and irreversibly changes not only the economy, but the whole life of man. He has a choice to either learn to use the new technologies or to ignore them and thus impede his own development” [32, p. 89]. Hence, media education places particular emphasis on education related to the use of information technologies [34].

Today, it is already widely known that computers and the Internet provide an opportunity to establish and maintain social contacts, to spend leisure time pleasantly, while enabling “painless” acquisition of digital competence. People who use the Internet have greater trust in political institutions and more often participate in civic projects. Importantly, formal activities in this area (school education) are complemented by the independent activity of young people. It is worth mentioning that using the Internet and being online generally depends on the education level and age of the Internet user. A nationwide study shows that in 2020 more than two-thirds of adult Poles (68%) will use the Internet at least once a week [7]. Relatively most Internet users are among those with higher education and the least among respondents with primary education, which, however, in the case of the latter group, is largely determined by older age and place of residence.

Internet use is nearly universal among those under 35, and very common among those between 35 and 54, the vast majority of whom are also online. Internet users make up more than half among respondents aged 55 to 64. In contrast, two-thirds of respondents aged 65 to 74 and nine in ten of the oldest respondents (75+) remain offline. All Internet users under the age of 35 and almost all those aged 35–54 go online wirelessly. Also among older respondents, the vast majority are mobile users.

It is also worth noting that respondents under the age of 35, especially those between 18 and 24, generally declare a permanent online presence, while among

those over 44, and especially among the oldest Internet users, ad hoc Internet “access” is dominant, related to handling solely a specific purpose [7].

Regarding children’s online presence, research results from recent years indicate [23] that almost all teenagers (93.4%) use the Internet on a daily basis. Children’s Internet initiation takes place on average at age of 9, with this age decreasing every year. Children are increasingly familiarizing themselves with the modern world mainly through the Internet, where they also satisfy their communication and personal needs.

Hence, mass access to the World Wide Web has revolutionized the way people communicate across all generations of its users. This process was further exacerbated by the global Covid pandemic and the sanitary restrictions imposed, resulting in mass quarantines, movement bans, and orders to study and work remotely. As a result, even people who were strongly associated with the traditional performance of their jobs (e.g. teachers, civil servants, etc.) were forced to enter the digital world and master at least the basic use of electronic systems. It is therefore necessary to agree with the thesis that society - taking advantage of the whole spectrum of benefits of technological development - has acquired the characteristics of an information society, creating a new type of society, which is a compilation of the characteristics of its predecessors.

Taking for granted that currently the activity of people in many areas has moved from the real world to cyberspace, and this process is intensifying every year [11], it is worth considering what impact it has on social activity and the level of social capital. The authors of the report *Social Diagnosis 2015* point to the relationship between social capital and time spent online. Based on the empirical data obtained, they formulated a thesis that the more time we spend online, the more social capital we possess. This relationship applies to both women and men [13]. That principle is also confirmed by other researchers, claiming that the use of computers and the Internet can increase social capital in the dimension of social contacts, involvement and a sense of belonging to a community and the implementation of common social goals, which do not always require our physical involvement [15, p. 34]. So, is the network society conducive to digital activity aimed at implementing the common good? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this society and what challenges does it create for security organizations?

Network society – a new challenge from a global perspective

One of the most influential and well-known theories of the “post-industrial” society, the so-called network society theory, was presented by the Spanish researcher Manuel Castells who thereby challenged the most important classical social theories [4, p. 15–16].

According to him, society constitutes a “space of flows” in which three main aspects play a key role: (1) information circuits and communication infrastructure; (2) nodes and (3) individuals (people) connected and distributed within the network. Additional attributes of the network society are “timelessness” and “simultaneity” – with respect to the category of time, and lack of geographical location – with respect to the category of space.

The first aspect is relatively obvious and the most tangible – in the new type of society there must physically exist a certain computer infrastructure (for example, wires, base stations, airports, stations, etc.), which make it possible to create a basic network of connections and virtual exchange of information. Consequently, we can say that information circuits are located at a specific, geographical address.

On the other hand, the second aspect, nodes – organize the network, by constantly processing information and establishing communication over long distances. The way nodes operate is already “timeless” and “non-local” - these concepts are a novelty introduced by Castells. A node can be, for example, a customer service point of a large corporation, physically operating in India, but serving customers from Europe or the United States. Another kind of node can be a single person, such as a popular blogger/influencer, even a personal development coach who travels the world but provides his or her services without interruption and regardless of the latitude or time zone he or she happens to be in. What is very important, Castells proves that the network has no centre and is of insignificantly hierarchical nature, instead being dispersed and changeable. This difference can be seen most clearly when comparing the great organizations of the industrial age: formal, centralized and highly hierarchical with the new type of organizations that are informal, dispersed and flexible. The researcher explains this phenomenon in this way: “A network by definition has no centre. It operates on the basis of a binary logic: on/off. Everything that belongs to it is useful to it and necessary for its existence. What does not belong to the network does not exist from the network’s perspective, so it must either be ignored (if it is irrelevant to the network’s tasks) or eliminated (if it competes with it in terms of goals or outcomes). If a node in the network ceases to perform a useful function, it is excluded from the network and the network reorganizes-just like cells in a biological process” [4, p. 15–16].

Let us return to the third aspect of the “space of flows”, namely people functioning in the network society. Castells believes that the new type of society will produce a certain elite, a management group (the so-called “gold collars”, as a reference to the popular term “white collars” denoting white collar workers of the 20th century). However, their status will not be determined by their bank account balance, possessions, type of work or education, but precisely by their ability to efficiently use information: obtain it, collect it, process it and use it. The researcher emphasizes that the elites of the network society will be linked by a similar, exclusive culture and lifestyle. He predicts that the primary determinants of this culture

will be a sense of transcending time and geographic barriers, and so the elite of the network society will be cosmopolitan, speaking foreign languages, working from anywhere in the world, and feeling “at home” everywhere like modern nomads.

In conclusion, Castells makes it clear that all aspects of networks (infrastructure, nodes and their complexity and interconnectedness) will vary depending on the country and its degree of “connectivity” to new technologies. Undoubtedly, however, networks will have an increasing influence on globalization processes, and this will translate into social identities in individual countries. The researcher also warns of the danger of continuous, infinite development of networks, without social supervision. He expresses concern that the real nightmare for humanity will not be the popular pop culture vision of robots taking over jobs, but a fully automated electronic system of computer transactions devoid of human control and any emotion.

The widespread networking of reality brings with it many challenges that both present opportunities for further development and threats in cyberspace. The latter are usually considered in a technological context, when a “node” or “circuit” stops working, and in relation to new types of fraud resulting in the theft of private data and finances. Meanwhile, the rapid technological leap, in addition to many undisputed advantages, also has some imperfections [20, p. 139–142] and even mass threats, extremely dangerous also for the organization of security systems in diverse areas. Systematizing the groups of threats and their impact on selected areas (fields) of security, the following threats, characteristic of the network society, can be indicated:

- in the area of political security: information monopoly or even totalitarianism, manipulation of public opinion and its susceptibility to information noise, filter bubbles or fake news, limited sense of freedom and privacy;
- in the area of personal security: dehumanization and social alienation, atomization of society, anonymity, and thus loss of ethical and moral barriers, reduced privacy through constant control and voyeurism;
- in the area of social security: digital exclusion, marginalization of selected social groups due to their ability to move in the virtual world, deepening social stratification in the area of education and culture resulting from unequal access to digital resources;
- in the area of economic and economic security: dependence on information systems, automation and robotisation of technological and technical processes, increase in the number of people disadvantaged on the labour market due to the level of IT skills;
- in the area of health security: use of health databases for non-medical purposes, new civilization diseases resulting from decreased physical activity and addiction to the Internet and computer games, diversified access to medical assistance.

Focusing on the object of study, it is worth considering on the way the attributes of the network society can be used to accomplish tasks for the common good? Is the cyber world conducive to grassroots social initiatives? In an attempt at answering this question, it can be pointed out that there are many arguments suggesting that the virtual network can contribute to building social activity and strengthening social capital.

The following arguments support this thesis: the network is based on interpersonal relations, building mutual relations and links in a given community; the potential of the network makes it possible to participate in various types of social consultations and to express opinions and judgments on socio-political issues, concerning national and local issues and problems; the Web is an excellent tool for social mobilization, for drawing attention to issues that may have gone unnoticed in social reality, but which have a chance to be publicized in the virtual world; the Web makes it possible to sign open letters, manifestos and petitions; the Web makes it possible to propose initiatives, to vote on the civic budget and participate in many other issues about which knowledge has been obtained from the Web.

It is worth confronting the presented arguments with the social reality and the results of empirical research, which indicate that social activity on the Web is not yet as obvious as it could be expected. Studies on the use of the Internet in civic practices indicate [9] that only 11% of Polish residents over the age of 16 have expressed their opinion through online voting and social consultations, and even less, only 5% have participated in marches, demonstrations and protests, deriving information about them from the web, via email, social networks or instant messaging. In this area, the relationship between age and this activity is noticeable, because the most active and active group were people in the age range between 16 and 24 and between 25 and 34 years old, respectively. Characteristically, the older the Internet users were, the less socialized they seemed to be. Also, a consistent trend is the fact that in civic practices, the Internet was used primarily among urban residents, especially residing in the largest ones, while rural residents used this tool much less frequently. Hence, the place of residence is a significant variable that differentiates the level of digital activity, as a result of Internet accessibility and digital exclusion. The extremes were 28% among residents of large cities and 4% in rural areas. The level of education also corresponded with the place of residence, showing the same correlation. One more fact, connected with the level of associative capital, is worth mentioning. The survey confirmed the rule that people who had been previously active in non-governmental organizations were more likely to become involved in on-line civic activities.

Conclusions

The process of transformation of industrial age societies, among which civil society patterns were dominant, into “post-industrial” societies – information societies, is more or less advanced, depending on the country in question. Researchers of this process point out that some countries are actually more “disconnected” than “connected” to the Internet, so on those areas the society tends to bear both ancient and modern characteristics. Perhaps this is also a clue as to how we should read the society transformation in Poland and countries with similar rates of technological development and networking. The question of whether networks have already become a form of operation of modern society and a basic pattern of social structure - still remains open.

Of course, empirical observations and theses of some researchers (such as E. Bendyk [2, p. 53]) confirm that many of Manuel Castells’ predictions have come true. Most people are already “connected” and use the web in some way (even if they themselves are not active users of the Internet and social media, their medical or financial data is certainly processed online by advanced programmes used in clinics, hospitals and banks). More and more matters do not need to be handled in a particular place or at a particular time: salaries and pensions are paid electronically to personal bank accounts, standard loans and credits can be taken out without leaving home, using only appropriate software and applications; the same is true of most official matters, such as registering one’s residence, registering the birth of a child or applying for social benefits. Online, we not only chat with friends, watch our favourite movies, or read the latest news, but also go shopping, order a cab, plan vacations and hold business conferences.

Another question that comes to mind is: does the new type of society, the so-called information (network) society, have any features in common with the civil society or is it rather its opposite?

Let us remind that the attributes of a civil society include: openness, commitment, integration, concern for common good, reliance on grassroots non-governmental organizations and large amounts of social capital. M. Gryczka [21, p. 107–122] adds: a high awareness of the needs of the community and an active pursuit of their implementation, activity, the ability to self-organization, voluntary engagement, criticism and pluralism, a sense of co-responsibility and innovation. As for the information society, most researchers define it as a type of society: atomized, closed, virtual, caring for its own welfare, with limited direct interpersonal contacts, functioning on the basis of high development of information systems and digital techniques. However, the research indicates that the use of the Internet does not limit civic activity at all, but only changes its areas and form of participation. A comparison of civic activity of Internet users and non-Internet users in selected specific situations shows that in each situation Internet users tended to be more

active. On this basis, we can formulate a thesis that in some cases the Internet does not hinder, and even helps to build a civil society (e.g., some people find it easier to express themselves on an Internet forum than to speak physically in front of a large group of people). Therefore, contrasting and definitively differentiating civil society and information society is an oversimplification. Therefore, it is worth talking about the evolution of civil society into a network society, which has been and continues to be fundamentally influenced by the digital revolution.

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