RELIGIOUS CHANGE AND ITS EFFECTS
ON SOCIAL CHANGE FOR ROMA IN SLOVAKIA

Tatiana PODOLINSKÁ – Tomaš HRUSTIČ

Institute of Ethnology, Slovak Academy of Sciences
Klemensova 19 813 64 Bratislava, Slovak Republic
E-mail: tatiana.podolinska@savba.sk; tomas.hrustic@savba.sk

Abstract: In 2010 the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences completed a research project on the effects of various religious missions on social change and the social inclusion of Roma in Slovakia – the SIRONA Project (Social Inclusion of the Roma by the Religious Pathway). The article first discusses methodological approaches to studying subjective perceptions of social change. Then the authors identify the mechanisms influencing the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of social change, among others the importance of pastoral discourse and its potential to be pro-exclusive, or pro-inclusive. Religious change is discussed from the perspective of social theories of social capital, social networks and social bonds. The paper reaches the conclusion that religious change has very strong potential to bring about social change which, although only in some cases, can lead also to social inclusion.

Keywords: Slovak Roma, religious change, social change, social inclusion and exclusion, social capital, social networks

In 2010 the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences conducted a research project focused on mapping the impacts of religious missions on the social inclusion of the Roma in Slovakia – Social Inclusion of Roma through Religion.[1] The project was implemented by a team of 20 researchers managed by Tatiana Podolinská, PhD and Tomáš Hrustič, PhD from the Institute of Ethnology of SAV.[2]

In Slovakia, we increasingly hear about the missionary outreach to the Roma community. These outreaches come from both traditional churches, as well as some newer and less traditional churches. The preliminary information from the field or from partial research has indicated that many of these missions have had a genuinely positive influence

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[1] SIRONA 2010. For an English summary see Podolinská – Hrustič 2011. The summary of the research findings is also available at the webpage of the Institute of Ethnology at Slovak Academy of Sciences (http://www.uet.sav.sk/download/Religion_as_a_path_to_change.pdf). A full version of the research findings is found in the Slovak publication, see Podolinská – Hrustič 2010.

[2] For the research team and localities of research, see PODOLINSKÁ – HRUSTIČ 2010.

on changing the lives of the Roma living in segregated communities. Until now though, there has not been any mapping of the locations and extent of the work of the church and religious groups. It has not been known how many missions there are and how many are actively engaged. An assumed 'side effect' of a religious conversion has been a positive social change which can facilitate social inclusion. This effect, however, has not yet been thoroughly researched. One of the goals of the SIRONA project was to comprehensively map the locations of all churches, religious groups and movements which have an impact among the Roma in Slovakia. In addition, the influence of spiritual conversions on social inclusion of the Roma in Slovakia was followed.

This study[3] reflects several methodological and analytical contexts of the research. The research was composed of a) preliminary mapping research; and b) qualitative research. The objective of the preliminary mapping research was to map the work of all missions that currently perform their activities among the Roma in Slovakia (either officially registered churches, or unofficially working churches, denominations, religious movements and civil associations with religious activities). The objective of the qualitative research was to map the different forms of social change in Roma communities which underwent a major religious change,[4] and to find out whether such change leads to social inclusion.[5]

The preliminary research was based on questionnaires which mapped the motivations, localities and experiences in current pastoral work among the Roma in the Slovak Republic. The qualitative field research was based on semi-structured interviews and participant observation carried out in several 'parallel' samples; our target group was not only the actors of religious change, but also passive observers/'witnesses' of this change. It was not our aim to find out the 'objective extent' of social inclusion measured by 'hard indicators' (employment rate or employability in the local labour market). We rather sought answers to the questions: what changes occur in the lives of the Roma who undergo a religious change? Does such a 'religious change' have an impact on their social life and behaviour? How are such changes perceived by the majority population living in their immediate proximity? How does a religious change in the Roma influence their social inclusion?

The basic hypothesis of the project was based on the assumption that it is the 'subjective extent' (perceptional extent) of perceiving a social change[6] by the Roma actors as such and by the non-Roma fellow citizens that forms the basic prerequisite enabling the

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[4] Religious change means dynamism in the religiousness of an individual (group). It can be manifested as a change in religious affiliation (conversion) or as a change in the extent of participation in the religious life of a church or religious group, or as a change in the intensity of personal experience (in faith). In our research, we mostly documented cases where we saw intensification or activation of an individual's (group's) religiousness. The term 'religious changes' also includes processes of a personal (group) religious 'cooling'. In the questionnaires obtained under the SIRONA 2010 research, the respondents, when defining 'religious change', often used terms such as 'spiritual conviction', 'consolidation of faith', 'more active engagement in the religious group's activities', 'change in the spiritual life', or 'spiritual change'.

[5] For the definition of 'social inclusion' see part 1.1.

[6] For the definition of 'social change' see part 1.1.

'objectification' of social change, i.e. actual 'transformation' to 'social inclusion' of the Roma in the general population in Slovakia.[7] Since stereotypes on both sides, based on 'subjective foundations', are the most frequent reasons for the social exclusion of Roma in Slovakia, the research on change in subjective perception on both sides was a principal issue for us.

In the framework of the SIRONA 2010 research project, we contacted 30 churches and organisations[8] with potential religious activities in the Roma communities in Slovakia, and we found that 19 of them are active among the Roma.[9] At present, 14 registered churches and five non-registered religious movements are actively involved among the Roma in Slovakia, conducting missions in about 130 localities in total and reaching out to about 10,000 Roma people (actively participating members). For further research purposes, we selected 15 localities in which we subsequently conducted field research.[10] These localities are places where various churches and religious movements conduct their activities in Roma communities. The qualitative research focused on three target groups of respondents. The first type of respondents was religious specialists (priests, clergymen, pastors, missionaries) working with the Roma. The second target group was local Roma members of the church or religious movement, i.e. Roma who are actively involved in the religious life of the given religious community. The third target group was official representatives of municipalities and of relevant municipal institutions (mayors, employees of labour offices, teachers, social field workers/assistants, community workers) and citizens who live in the given localities and are not members of a religious group and are not involved in religious life, but come into contact with the Roma on a daily basis. A total of 225 (285) interviews[11] were collected in this part of the research, as well as 15 (19) transcripts of observations of religious ceremonies, and 15 (19) final research reports. The research outputs included recommendations which we split into four groups according to the different types of stakeholders – church, state administration, self-government and non-governmental organisations.[12]

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[7] More precisely, we could speak about an increased rate of inclusion of socially excluded Roma/Roma communities in the local societies.

[8] We contacted all registered churches and religious groups in Slovakia, as well as several non-registered religious groups; we believe that we were able to address all religious organisations which were active in Roma communities in Slovakia at the time of conducting the research.

[9] For detailed information see PODOLINSKÁ – HRUSTIČ 2011: 16–17.

[10] See PODOLINSKÁ – HRUSTIČ 2011. For capacity reasons, the qualitative research could not cover all 19 religious organisations conducting missions in the Roma communities in Slovakia. Some religious organisations which were involved in the mapping part of the project did not give their consent to conducting the qualitative part of the research.

[11] The number in parentheses represents the sum of interviews, observations and final reports if the research of students involved in the project is counted.

[12] For a more detailed description of concrete recommendations, refer to the final recommendations in Chapter 6, PODOLINSKÁ – HRUSTIČ 2011: 42–46.

1. TERMINOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

1.1. TERMINOLOGY, HYPOTHESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

First, the terminology and methodology of the project. The project, as it was originally conceived, has primarily applicational ambitions. In a sense, when designing it, we allowed ourselves a big 'terminological luxury'. We use the commonly used term 'social inclusion' in the 'project language,[13] without a more detailed definition. After all, our research project itself was supported with the title 'Social inclusion of Roma by the religious pathway'. Because of this ambiguity we defined the term of social inclusion as follows: 'Social inclusion of an individual or a group. A previously external/marginalised individual (group) finds itself in the internal space of the majority group (society) and gains a real opportunity to participate in the development of the majority group's capitals. The mainstream society is trying by social inclusion to reduce social conflict and tensions with excluded individuals or groups. In principle, it depends on the degree of closeness of the internal space of the recipient group (society); in general, without intervention and the will to open up internal space for outsiders to their social inclusion by the majority group (society) social inclusion is not possible'.[14] In this working definition, we have suggested the importance of synergy effects, i.e. an external/the outsider/marginalised subject has the will to 'integrate' (be included), while the mainstream group has the will to open up. However, during the project we realized that we cannot use the term 'social inclusion" as the primary unit of our analysis, because with a small project of this scale we can hardly capture long and complex processes of social inclusion. Instead of 'social inclusion' we started working with the term 'social change'. Thus we redefined our initial hypothesis (that the religious conversion of Roma can lead to their social inclusion) in two specific research questions:

A) 'Is a religious change followed by a social change?'

B) 'Does social change lead to social inclusion?'

Social change is defined in order that it could be captured during the empirical field research as a 'change in social customs, habits, competencies, skills and behaviours of individuals or groups. It is a dynamic phenomenon that is defined as a change (compared to the previous state), by actors themselves or by active initiators or by passive observers of the change.[15]

The introduction of 'social change' as the primary unit of analysis in our case appeared to be very productive. This methodological switch allowed us to observe which specific manifestations of social behaviour of target groups of respondents rated as direct consequences of religious change.

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[13] This term is routinely used in social practice. Moreover, this rather vague and ambiguous term is frequently used in defining objectives of European policies focused on social integration of Roma into mainstream society, e.g. Decade of Roma Inclusion, etc.

[14] PODOLINSKÁ – HRUSTIČ 2010: 162.

[15] PODOLINSKÁ – HRUSTIČ 2010: 163.

The term 'social change' also enabled us to ascertain precisely the validity/invalidity of our initial hypotheses. In our case, this meant first verifying the validity of claims that religious change produces social change. As for the first research question (A), we confirmed that religious change has great potential to produce social change.

For the next phase of the research we introduced a unit of secondary analysis – the term 'positive social change", which allowed us to elaborate the second research question (B) more precisely.

Positive social change is defined as a change in social customs, habits, competencies, skills and behaviour of individuals or groups, which from the emic perspective of the actors, active initiators or passive observers of this change is perceived as positive.[16]

At this stage we were able to examine the second research question, whether the social change, or whether the social change perceived as positive leads to social inclusion. We have not obtained a straightforward answer on this question. In this study we will try to define some basic factors which we encountered during the testing of social effectiveness of religious change. The combination of these factors then determines whether religious change that will produce positive social change leads to the final effect of social inclusion or not.

1.2 METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

1.2.1 Anyone who is Looking for a Change Will Find a Change?

This seemingly trivial question is actually a key methodological issue. How to research a 'change' in our case so that we do not 'contaminate' our research sample with our research hypothesis or our purpose? Probably the best methodological solution is to enter a field without *a priori* hypotheses. These should arise *ex post* during qualitative and professionally competent, analytical research.

In this regard, we note that the initial hypothesis of our project (i.e., that religious change has the potential of the social inclusion of Roma), was formulated considering assumptions arising from various resources and previous researches not focused on religious change. For example indirect findings of previous, differently oriented projects or other smaller studies focused on marginalised Roma communities. Most of the members of the research team have known the terrain over a long period, some are dedicated to working with Roma almost daily, and are familiar with the position of non-governmental organizations. Another source for the formulation of initial hypotheses was inspired by the work and findings of different NGOs dealing with Roma issues in Slovakia (the National Democratic Institute, Milan Šimečka Foundation, Roma Public Policy Institute, ETP Slovakia, People in Need Slovakia) and information from social workers in the field and employees of community centres. The last source and verification platform was our previous researches primarily focused on mapping the activities of missions among the Roma in Slovakia.

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[16] Podolinská – Hrustič 2010: 162.

Based on these three sources the initial hypothesis was formulated. However, during the research we realized its potential weakness and we reformulated it into two research questions. We believe that the reformulation of the hypothesis, perhaps predicting in advance the general conclusion that religious change leads to social inclusion, prevented us from contaminating the research with the research purpose. We focused therefore on the research of social change. We knew from various indirect studies and our previous researches, which were not primarily aimed at 'looking for social change' that the social change caused by a religious change is present in the field. Our research was thus mainly focused on obtaining and weighing specific manifestations considered and defined as a 'change' by respondents. Finally, social change is a neutral term, respondents could indicate examples of 'positive' and also 'negative change'. From a methodological point of view the key was to examine social change in three groups of respondents (initiators of change, change agents and passive observers). Using a 'control sample' of a neutral (from the first sight) group of (external) observers ('non-Roma non-converts': in our case, local government officials, labour officers, social workers in the field, but also 'ordinary' people of the village) has allowed us to examine social change from the perspective of several reference levels.

1.2.2. Subjectivity as the Scientific Basis

In the context of our research, we studied perceived social change programmatically. That means we did not examine the 'real change', but we examined the perception of changes in the testimonies of informants from the three target groups.[17] The initial hypothesis of the project rested on the assumption that 'a subjective measure' of perceiving social change by actors themselves (Roma, but also non-Roma fellow citizens) is essential for enabling 'objectification' of social change, that is, its transformation into a form of 'social inclusion' of Roma into mainstream society.[18] Since one of many reasons for social exclusion[19] of Roma in Slovakia is two-sided stereotypes subjectively perceived by both parts, the research of subjective perceptions on both sides was key for us. After all, our research confirmed that even a positively perceived social change does not mean automatically social inclusion. In certain circumstances, this effect of social inclusion does not occur or occurs only after a certain time. Sometimes an effect of deepening social exclusion, especially because of religious prejudices, may even appear.

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[17] Our project was intentionally built on subjectivity and we think that it was the only option to design it methodologically correctly. Social change (not to mention social inclusion or exclusion) cannot be examined as 'objective'. What we can examine are the testimonies of social change, social change itself is practically very difficult to 'verify'. For further discussions about the research methodology of SIRONA 2010, see Lužný 2011: 200–202.

[18] More precisely, we should talk about the increased integration of socially excluded Roma / Roma communities to local communities.

[19] 'Social exclusion': the social exclusion of individuals or groups. Sometimes defined as a higher degree of marginalisation, but social exclusion does not necessarily go through a 'marginalisation phase'. Socially excluded individuals (groups) find themselves in the external area of the majority group (society) and are actually completely separated from the possibility to participate in the development of their capitals. Through social exclusion the majority society reduces internal tensions and increases its internal consistency and conformity to the 'detriment' of the excluded individual (group) (Podolinská – Hrustič 2011: 19).

2. PRIMARY ANALYSIS

2.1. CHANGE FROM THE 'OUTSIDE' PERSPECTIVE: FIXED SET OF INDICATORS

Since the research was focused on the influence of religious missions on social change and potential social inclusion of Roma, we identified a fixed set of 'indicators of social inclusion' (ISI). Thus, we were observing the frequency of these indicators in the field among the three groups of respondents ('religious leaders', 'Roma converts', 'external, passive observers'). This fixed set of indicators was composed of 'hard' indicators of social inclusion, such as 'inclusion on labour market' or 'school attendance',[20] etc., but also of 'softer' indicators, in order to capture subtler changes able to initiate more complex processes of social change. That means we tried to capture indicators such as improvement of communication skills or acquiring new social skills, etc. which detect social change and have a high potential to lead to social inclusion. The set of indicators was largely based on previous mapping research – most of these indicators were proposed by the representatives of churches and religious movements based on their experience in the field. The fixed set of ISI tested in all three target groups included the following 14 indicators[21]:

Increased school attendance of children
Decline in indebtedness
Reduced usury
Increased activity in seeking a job
Higher capacity to stay on the labour market
Decline in petty crime
Fewer problems with alcoholism and other narcotics
Less gambling and less addiction to hazardous games
Increased literacy rate (elimination of illiteracy)
Enhanced communication skills
Enhanced social skills
Increased frequency of positive contacts with other Roma (Roma from other municipalities)
Increased frequency of positive contacts with the general population
Elimination of common stereotypes
Other
(Fixed set of social ISI tested in all types of questionnaires, SIRONA 2010 research project.)

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[20] National indicators of social inclusion were defined for example in the National report on strategies of social protection and social inclusion for 2008–2010, or in the report on Evaluation of suitability of system of indicators and their use in the Operational program Employment and social inclusion (see bibliography, internet references).

[21] Informants had a chance to weigh all indicators according to their point of view and they could identify their own ranking of indicators according their own experience and importance. The set of indicators was open and included a possibility to name 'other' indicators.

After processing all the data necessary to assess the success of a fixed set of ISI (i.e. in all three types of questionnaires, in three target groups and for all the churches and religious movements), we observed a success rate of at least 80% for each indicator.[22] Pro-inclusive social effects of missions among Roma were thus declared not only by religious leaders and converts, but also by their non-Roma and non-converted neighbours.

The most successful indicators according to research findings are: decrease in substance abuse (fewer problems with alcoholism and other narcotics), decline in petty crime and decline in indebtedness for those Roma who were members of religious movements.

The least successful (we are speaking about an average success rate of 80%) were the indicators for the elimination of stereotypes and barriers (in this regard the most important factor seems to be time, e.g. that these changes need more time).

2.2. CHANGE FROM THE 'INSIDE' PERSPECTIVE: 'OTHER' INDICATORS[23]

One of the most crucial factors of the research was that the set of indicators was open and informants had a chance to list their own indicators of social change. In other words, informants could in their own words describe social change that has occurred, in their perspective, under the influence of religious change. This enabled us to capture the importance of indicators of social change from the perspective of believers across the spectrum of churches and religious communities. And although researchers were not able to capture 'other" indicators of social change in all (100%) interviews, those indicators that we were able to capture speak about some differences in the perception of social change among different churches and religious movements. Roma believers reflected their social change in the following 'indicators':

improvement of marital relations
improvement of relations between children and parents
change in consumer behaviour
change in family finance management
change in value orientation
increased responsibility for one's own life
increased self-respect
activation (in seeking a job, engagement in social networks)
improved, more cultivated behaviour and communication
change in life strategies (more long-term visions, positive self-projections)
(ISI listed in column 15, 'Other', from SIRONA 2010 research project questionnaires.)

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[22] We still speak about perception, in this case a perception of effectiveness of various indicators in three groups of informants. That means that 80% of informants subjectively perceived, for example, that the school attendance of converts' children improved.

[23] In this part of the text we will refer mostly to interviews with religious leaders and Roma converts (questionnaires B1 and B2, see Podolinská – Hrustič 2010: 122–125).

The most frequent were: improvement of relations in the nuclear family, with emphasis on marital relationships and relationships between children and parents; improvement of behaviour stemming from changes in value orientation and ethics; change in consumer behaviour and change in family finance management. All these 'changes' were more or less equally represented in the respondents of all churches and religious societies. We noted, however, several specific patterns in indicators prevailing in dominant and traditional churches[24] and those prevailing in small churches and religious movements with less traditional rites. In these cases we speak mainly about the change of perception of church sacraments and altered attitudes to 'magical practices and superstition'.

Most religious believers defined the religious change in the community according to a change of behaviour based on the change of ethics and value orientations.[25] This change was often linked to forging relationships among adolescents, sexual behaviour and spending of leisure time, which is reflected by respondents in fewer teenage pregnancies or teenage marriages.[26] At the same time great emphasis has been placed on change of language and means of expression, increase of respect for elders and a general improvement in behaviour among young people and children. Very common, especially among converts to small and non-traditional churches, was the perception of the negative impact of gossiping. Informants placed this change very high on ranks of altered behavioural patterns.

Another important factor in capturing the subjective process of social change has been statements about change in overall situation in the community. In these cases, respondents frequently reported that their community, village, or town is gradually becoming a more enjoyable place to live in.

An important part of religious changes was also the change in the perception of the importance of church sacraments. This change has two positions. Within big traditional churches the informants emphasised the importance of the sacraments resulting in an increasing number of church weddings, first communions and confirmations among Roma believers. At the same time, the interpretation of the meaning of baptising infants changed (testimonies of believers corresponded more with official denominational discourse and doctrines).[27] However, in cases of conversion to churches or religious movements which

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[24] We will also use a term 'big churches' in this paper, meaning the churches which occupied the first five places as to membership according to the Slovak Census results from 2001. These churches are often denoted in literature as 'traditional', 'dominant' or 'majority' Christian churches. According to membership data of the Slovak Census results from 2001, these churches aree: Roman Catholic Church, Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, Greek Catholic Church, Reformed Christian Church, and Orthodox Church.

[25] Statements made by informants often reflected mostly personal change in value orientation and priorities. Religious change (regardless of whether we speak about conversion or intensification of faith and practice within the original denomination) causes the twist in ranking values. The values stemming from a 'spiritual nature' are more prioritised, and material values are perceived as less important. Some theorists of religious conversion consider the change of values to be the final stage of religious conversion. The last stage of conversion is usually consequences stemming from such changes in the scale of values resulting in behavioural change, change of social contacts and change of lifestyle (RAMBO – FARHADIAN 1999).

[26] It should be noted that we focused on the subjective perception of believing respondents. For example, we have not documented statistically the lower frequency of teenage pregnancies in marital registers and birth certificates in specific locations. Our interviews captured subjective testimonies of the respondents.

[27] Infant baptism among Roma is often conducted as a protective measure (magical protection from evil spirits). See for example MANN 1994.

reject infant baptisms, the number of infant baptisms in church declined, but, on the other hand, the importance of other sacraments, particularly religious marriages, increased. Among the converts to Pentecostal and Charismatic movements[28] we captured the phenomenon of diminishing sacraments in the dominant local churches and also the phenomenon of iconoclasm – the converts were getting rid of their holy pictures and statues following predominantly Protestant-oriented pastoral discourses in these denominations.

In the context of religious conversion and religious marriages we met with significant change in the perception of the choice of marital partners.[29] For example, in one locality there were relatively frequent marriages between the local Slovak Roma and the Vlach Roma community. Believers explained this change using religious terms ('before God we are all equal') and used this example as an evidence for changes that occurred after the 'conversion'. In the case of officially unregistered religious movements,[30] which cannot officially marry couples, informants put emphasis on the need for civil marriage in combination with informal pastoral blessing of the new couple. Believers, however, are very well aware of this contradiction, and express wishes to have legal church weddings in their denomination.

Respondents often emphasised the change in family relationships, especially in married couples. This change was often articulated in terms of improving communication. One of the causes for this change was the elimination of alcohol, domestic violence and cases of marital infidelity (about the same rate for women as for men). Statements about this type of improvements in family relationships were gathered from informants of all churches and religious movements. The change of values and priorities, according to informants, also leads to the fact that families can better manage their finances.[31]

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[28] See more in PODOLINSKÁ – HRUSTIČ 2010: 161.

[29] The choice of a life partner is very limited and more difficult for converts to small religious movements. Many believers/converts would like to find a life partner 'in the same faith'. For example, the younger generation of Roma Jehovah's Witnesses, particularly in rural areas, has in some cases difficulty in finding a life partner among their peers in their home villages. We met with several young married Roma couples in which partners came from distant regions of Slovakia. Their testimony showed that they met during big regional and national gatherings of Jehovah's Witnesses. Several Roma families confirmed that they do not attend these gatherings only for religious reasons, they perceive them also as a social event. (For example see HRUSTIČ 2011: 25.)

[30] According to the amendment of the law valid since 2007 (Act No. 201/2007 Coll.), the registration of churches and religious groups in Slovakia is extremely problematic, as it establishes an obligation on the organisation applying for registration to obtain the consent of at least 20,000 persons who are members of that church or religious group. This requirement is one of the strictest among the European Union Member States, and it provoked many expert and public discussions at the time of entering into effect. Registered churches in the Slovak Republic have several recognised rights, for example, the right to teach religion at schools, provide spiritual and material services, organise gatherings without notice, establish and run facilities for providing health care and social services, and marry couples, such marriages having the same legal status as marriages contracted in a civil ceremony.

[31] During the research 285 interviews were gathered and the core of these interviews consists of conversion narratives. These interviews are a very valuable source of information about conversions perceived as an individual path or individual life project, which aims not only to rethink roles, but also at positive self-projections in the long term perspective. Given the scale and nature of these sources, we want to analyse them in a separate publication.

3. BETWEEN INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION: SELECTED TOPICS

Now we will try to describe a few basic factors which we consider relevant for the social effectiveness of religious change. It is important not to forget the fact that social inclusion and religious change are two autonomous, dynamic and complex processes that often take place on the elusive individual or local micro level. Based on the testimonies gathered during the qualitative phase of the research, however, we would draw attention to several factors that seem to be crucial. Again, it is important to emphasise that it is their combination which is a key issue. The 'synergy' of these factors determines whether a religious change producing positive social change leads to the final effect of social inclusion or not.

Based on the results of the SIRONA 2010 research, we consider the following to be the most influential factors of social inclusion/exclusion by a religious path: 1) pastoral discourse, 2) type of a religious community, 3) social effectiveness of the religious mission (ability to produce positive social change), 4) type of social network in the religious community, and 5) type of social capital which church members can achieve in the religious community.

3.1. PASTORAL DISCOURSE

The research affirmed that a pastoral discourse can become an extremely effective tool for social change. In practice, it means that converts experience a social change mainly in relation to those elements which are explicitly accentuated in a particular pastoral discourse of a church or religious group. For example, if a priest/pastor accentuates the making of Roma marriages official or stresses the need for confirmation promises, the number of church marriages and confirmations in the Roma community largely increases. In this case, however, no positive change can be observed in the indicators of habit-forming substances or usury. If, on the other hand, the pastoral discourse insists on a reduction of the intake of alcohol or smoking, these factors would gradually change. The research also confirmed that if pastoral outreach focuses on one group only (age group or gender), a social change is manifested in that group only. Moreover, its overall effect is highly influenced by other 'unchanged' groups of the community. It turned out that in the case of significant social changes the pastoral discourse was complex and the mission focused on work with all groups of the target community. The research also showed that a pastoral discourse can influence the financial management of households of converts' families, and their consumer behaviour markedly changes, too. Municipal councils in several localities studied affirmed that converted Roma make efforts not to run into debt (either with the municipal office or external non-banking institutions). The internal debt rate or usury significantly declines, too. A pastoral discourse can also have a positive impact on improvement of school attendance and can motivate an increase in the education level not only in children, but also in adults. Moreover, it can positively influence a more responsible approach to parenthood. It can be stated in general that in a relatively short time perspective and with the use of minimum input costs the pastoral discourse can make

a community socially 'sound' and provide not only concrete guidelines, but also concrete positive examples to people who have long lived in social need. The research showed that many pastors and priests provide wide-spectrum social services in socially excluded communities, thus largely substituting the lack of social services directed to these communities. Their work is not limited to pastoral activities (spiritual pastoral outreach) – the majority of them, in fact, act as social mentors providing their clients with social counselling. According to the statements of many of them, the complexity and concreteness of their approach is the key to a stable and successful missionary work. Many of them also expressed an opinion that the specific approach that they choose is given by the specific situation of the people they work with. On the basis of their practical experience in pastoral outreach they indirectly formulated the opinion that generational and group poverty is a special phenomenon which should be addressed in a way other than situational and individual poverty is.[32]

The research showed that in the pastoral discourse churches and religious groups working among the Roma in Slovakia sometimes apply a religiously 'exclusive model'. An exclusive pastoral discourse strictly accentuates the exclusivity of a certain religious group or religious world view. The exclusive pastoral discourse works with a strict differentiation between the positions 'us' and 'them', attaching positive evaluations (true, real, correct, worth following, etc.) to the 'us' / 'our' group. Such a discourse gives rise to the creation of closed religious groups resembling elite clubs. The research demonstrated that the leader of a religious group who uses an exclusive pastoral discourse can increase the sensitivity of the group members not only to religiously different 'non-members', but also their sensitivity to any (i.e. non-religious) otherness. Thus, a group's religious exclusivity can intensify or instigate not only religious, but also social tensions (also within originally homogeneous groups). If the pastoral discourse puts emphasis on accentuating the difference between members and non-members (where the members of the religious group are predominantly or exclusively Roma), the Roma members of the religious group and non-Roma citizens of the municipality, for example, are not likely to become closer to each other or make more frequent contacts. As a result, churches/denominations which put too much emphasis in the pastoral discourse on the exclusivity of their members have the potential to increase tensions both in the municipality and in the socially excluded Roma community as such. Hence, from the point of view of social inclusion, a strictly exclusive pastoral discourse can have rather counterproductive effects. Strict forms of exclusive religious groups can lead to social exclusion (or deepening of the social exclusion) of its members.

While conducting our research, we also found an opposite approach denoted as inclusive pastoral discourse. An inclusive pastoral discourse respects the multiplicity of

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[32] "Generational poverty is defined as poverty of two consecutive generations. Yet, its features often start manifesting long before a family comes into contact with people living in generational poverty. Situational poverty is defined as lack of resources as a consequence of concrete events (death, chronic disease, divorce, etc.). Generational poverty has its own culture, unwritten rules and system of values. (...) In generational poverty, an individual holds the opinion that the society always owes something to you. On the other hand, what prevails in situational poverty is pride and refusal to accept help" (according to Payne – DeVol – Dreussi Smith 2010: 55).

religious truths and paths and encourages religious tolerance. Pastors or priests guide the members of their religious group to active cooperation with the non-members of the group. Thus, an inclusive pastoral discourse can largely contribute to the social inclusion of excluded individuals and groups. If the pastoral discourse puts emphasis on inclusiveness or at least on respecting the right to religious otherness or indifference, this produces higher sensitivity in the members to the respect of otherness. This can largely prevent various polarisations occurring either inside Roma communities polarised by family or gender, or at the Roma community–municipality level.

The research pointed out that the different forms of 'inclusiveness' or 'exclusiveness' in pastoral discourses did not depend on a particular type of church or religious group. Tendencies to an exclusive pastoral discourse are rather strategies of concrete pastors and priests evoked by the given situation, and originate in religiously rival environments[33] with parallel pastoral work of various churches and religious groups within one Roma community.

3.2. TYPE OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Taking into account the nature of the religious scene in Slovak society[34] we see that the type of religious community can be extremely important, particularly at the time of entry into the local community. From this perspective, we distinguish religious groups according to whether their initial potential is more pro-inclusive or pro-exclusive.

Big traditional churches, in other words, those religious denominations which are dominant in local communities, have the highest initial pro-inclusive potential (they have a large number of local members and are well established, traditional). In this context it is interesting that even when they use religiously exclusive pastoral discourse, as this is the dominant local church representing the majority community, the effect of exclusive pastoral discourse is largely eliminated. A successful Roma mission of a dominant local church therefore has *a priori* high potential for social inclusion. This potential, however, does not necessarily occur in a particular situation. In our case it is essential that we do not speak only about socially excluded individuals/groups, but also about individuals/groups, to which the stigmatised Roma ethnicity is attributed. This element is so dominant that mostly the local majority community represents a 'closed group' which does not allow for religious inclusion of Roma in their locality. The majority community then often insists that the locally dominant church have a separate mission for the Roma. This phenomenon can then be interpreted as a manifestation of deepening of social exclusion.[35]

The majority of local minority churches and religious groups (usually non-registered, non-traditional or locally unknown religious organisations with a small membership)

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[33] A religiously rival environment is an environment where at least two churches or organisations with religious activities work parallel within one locality or target group, and at least one of them sees this situation as a state of being endangered (membership reduction, shift of members to other denominations, parallel visiting of several religious organisations, etc.).

[34] PODOLINSKÁ 2010.

[35] This statement does not have an evaluative character. From the pastoral point of view, many pastors and priests consider separation of a purely Roma mission as an extremely successful and effective solution.

come to concrete localities with a very small initial pro-inclusive potential. If the local majority population views the religious group working in the Roma community as a 'sect', the group can even enter the local scene with a pro-exclusive potential in specific cases. Whether such potential is manifested, largely depends on whether religious leaders apply an inclusive or an exclusive pastoral discourse in the religious group, to what extent they contribute to the dissemination of positive examples of change among citizens of the municipality, and to what extent they are able to establish cooperation with the local self-government.

Yet, in practice we observed cases where the majority in some localities respected the work of small and registered churches and perceived it as an effective social tool. In these cases, both the labels 'Roma' and 'sectarian' were re-evaluated (under the influence of a positive social change among the Roma members of the religious group). The initial pro-exclusive potential of the locally minority church (religious group) will not be necessarily manifested and, in a particular situation, we can observe the effect of the social inclusion of Roma converts.

3.3. SOCIAL EFFECTIVENESS OF RELIGIOUS CHANGE

The research showed that the resulting effect of inclusion or exclusion is largely determined also by the ability of the religious community to produce (except for religious change) wide-ranging and stable positive social change. Based on the research data, mostly 'non-traditional' missions, in the Slovak context, missions based on Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity (or movements of charismatic renewal within big traditional churches), appear to be largely productive in producing social change. Their pastoral discourse includes many social elements and provides their own members with concrete guidelines for regulating their everyday lives. They specifically fight against external and internal indebtedness of their members, against alcoholism, gambling, drugs, theft; they teach their members to manage their finances and adapt their family consumer basket to the amount of available money, motivate them in seeking a job, and support their social participation and activity.[36]

From the point of view of intensity and a wider scope of positive social change, local dominant big (traditional) churches were the least effective. The research affirmed that the pastoral discourse of these denominations is usually not focused on achieving a social change/inclusion of Roma. The principal emphasis is put on doctrinal issues ('spiritual growth') and related elimination of the 'defects' of Roma converts (emphasis on regular attendance at religious services; making marriages official; first holy communion; confirmation promises; etc.). Work aimed at the acquisition of social skills and competencies,

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[36] These movements bring a universality concept reaching beyond the ethnic and social context not only at the theoretical and doctrinal levels, but also directly in practice. It is evident that this declared and practically used negation of ethnic and social 'labels' has a great impact on the Roma's interest (especially those from socially excluded communities) in these movements. Another important factor is the 'non-traditional' rite and the form of experiencing faith – personal contact with God, emphasis put on emotionality, spontaneously experienced faith demonstrated by singing and emotional (even ecstatic) manifestations.

positive management of crisis situations (alcoholism, drugs, truancy, gambling, etc.), incentives to seek a job, increasing the level of education and involvement in municipality activities are rather perceived as an additional 'optional activity' that depends on the priest's decision. The stabilising effect of the social change achieved is also influenced by the focus of some churches on certain age groups of the community (predominantly children). Locally dominant churches are often passive in their missions among the Roma, and due to their conservative approach they largely contribute to the spread and creation of stereotype opinions about the Roma, representing them as religiously passive, unstable, 'incorrigible' and 'non-adaptable'.

3.4. RELIGIOUS GROUP AS A SOCIAL NETWORK

The research demonstrated that one of the reasons why, in general, religious missions are highly effective in bringing a social change to excluded Roma communities is the fact that they come with a special offer of social networks.

A religious group is a certain type of social network that enables its members to undertake various types of active and passive participation. We will try to describe mechanisms by which a religious community becomes a specific or hybrid type of social network and how the nature of social networks within the religious community influences social exclusion or inclusion. Among the many concepts of social network theories[37] we mainly work with the following: a) primary and secondary networks (inherited or acquired networks),[38] b) open and closed networks (access is free or strictly controlled),[39] and c) networks in which weak or strong ties prevail (intense / emotional ties mainly in family networks or formal/looser ties mainly in professional relations).[40]

Participation in open secondary social networks in which weak ties prevail is crucial in terms of social inclusion of socially excluded individuals and groups.[41] Most functional social networks in socially excluded Roma communities are, however, closed primary networks in which strong ties prevail. Such social networks are ideal for obtaining an important sense of personal assurance. However, within this area, the individual has only little opportunity to acquire new resources, and social mobility and flexibility is thus significantly determined.

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[37] For the context of religious movements and social network theories see PODOLINSKÁ – HRUSTIČ 2010: 103–107.

[38] For details on primary and secondary group see, for example, NOVOTNÁ 2010: 69.

[39] See, for example, NOVOTNÁ 2010: 43–45.

[40] See, for example, KELLER 2009: 21, 27–28, 123, 159.

[41] According to some social scientists the strong ties are crucial to stabilise our social status, while the development of weak ties introduces us to a wider social context and opens up new opportunities which can replace our (initial) lack of resources: 'In seeking a job, casual or more distant acquaintances (colleagues from former work, classmates, etc.) provide numerous, more valuable information than our close relatives and good friends are able to provide us. They can connect us with a more distant and more diverse environment than the one we share with our closest ones' (GRANOVETTER 2000).

3.4.1. Religious Group as a Hybrid Type of Social Network

Religious groups enter the socially excluded communities with a very specific package of social networks, which is a kind of intersection of the above-mentioned types of social networks.

The unique nature of a social network brought by religious groups to Roma communities lies in building the community as a family (calling each other sister and brother, etc.). At the same time, it is voluntary groups of individuals connected by a common (religious) interest that, apart from religious activities, carry out a whole range of non-religious activities, thanks to which they can be socially involved in the secondary social network. Yet, we should not forget that the principal activities have a religious character, which is closely linked to the nature of skills and competencies acquired by the Roma converts in the framework of these activities. With regard to the theoretical concepts, it is a kind of hybrid of primary and secondary networks. A religious group could also be described as an artificially, i.e. secondarily built 'family'.

Religious groups are very specific, even if we try to apply the concept of open and closed networks. In the recruitment of new members, many of them behave as open social networks; but after obtaining and stabilizing the membership, the tendency to close may prevail. The missionary discourse is often extremely 'open' (inclusive). Yet, a later pastoral discourse may acquire features of exclusivity because of the need to stabilise membership and to test the 'soundness' of its members. A similar tendency can occur when a religious group finds itself in rivalry with another religious group. The nature of the pastoral discourse is the key in this direction.

In this manner we could state that religious groups are a hybrid type of social network; they can be open or closed, and are dominated by weak types of ties, but with a high potential to substitute strong ties.[42] Hence, religious groups offer their members 'insurance in crisis situations', while largely expanding their possibilities to obtain new sources or helping them to compensate for their initial lack of resources. Their success in social inclusion can also result from this 'intermediate' position.

3.5. RELIGIOUS GROUP AS A SOURCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

In general, the entry of a socially excluded individual to a social network considerably increases the person's possibilities for social capital accumulation. The higher (wider, more diverse) the social capital of the individual is, the higher the probability is that such an individual is able to compensate for the lack of any of their input sources.[43] For a socially excluded individual, it is absolutely important to build and expand their social capital.

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[42] As the research data showed, for example, in cases of financial distress, members of the group participate in providing a way of stabilising a critical situation.

[43] On the basis of the work of social workers, Payne – DeVol – Dreussi Smith found that their clients were 'poor' or socially dependent mainly because of their lack of input sources. These can be financial, emotional, mental, spiritual or physical, and also include knowledge of unwritten rules of the middle class, access to support systems and life examples (Payne – DeVol – Dreussi Smith 2010: 17).

A religious group is undoubtedly an opportunity for them to build their social capital. Yet, such capital has a specific nature. To describe these specific features, we will use some of the theses from selected general social capital concepts.

Social capital represents the resources of other people whom we can mobilise in our favour, provided that we are inter-connected with these people and that we have an access to them. The size of an individual's social capital is given by the width of the network of relations they can actually use and by the size of the economic, cultural or symbolic capital owned by other people to whom that individual is closely tied.[44] Social theorists differentiate between three types of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking capital.[45]

According to this concept, the form of social capital has a big influence on the social exclusion or inclusion of an individual. A bonding capital is accumulated by establishing relations with socially similar individuals (individuals from the same social class). This capital promotes our position within that class. From the point of view of this concept, it is important for the socially excluded individuals to build their social relations (their social capital) with individuals from a 'higher social class' – in this case with socially included individuals. Such a capital is considered to be a bridging capital and for a socially excluded individual it can be the key in seeking their way out from social exclusion.

Within a religious group we can observe accumulation of a specific type of social capital. The group members naturally evaluate its quality as highly positive. Hence, bonding capital greatly increases. Yet, the overall value of the social capital (or its bridging potential) is 'tested' outside of the religious group. How the religious group is perceived by the local non-members or external observers is therefore important. If the religious group has a certain weight and prestige in the local community (among non-members), then it is able to bring social capital to its members even beyond its religious scope of activities. This kind of capital is clearly a 'bridging' one. However, the possibilities of some religious groups are very specific in this regard. Non-members who usually claim a different denomination than the members of the religious group see its activities as rival ones, and – at least for this reason – they are not able to view positively the social capital that the religious group offers to its members. Paradoxically, in spite of the accumulation of social capital within the religious group, its evaluation by the external non-members can become problematic. Also in this relation we can observe a certain 'intermediate character' of the social capital produced by a religious group based especially on the fact that such capital is religious. A case characterised by the accumulation of bonding capital without positive external evaluation should be considered as a case without a bridging capital. Yet, for many Roma converts from socially excluded communities, the religious

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[44] In this chapter we work with the social capital concept of Pierre Bourdieu (1980).

[45] 'The bonding social capital works within homogeneous groups. Their members are willing to help each other, but have the tendency to ignore the needs and interests of all those standing outside of their group. They are concerned only about themselves and, to a greater or lesser extent, they develop a cult of their own exclusivity. This happens, for example, in cases of ethnic groups or exclusive clubs for the few. On the other hand, a bridging capital means willingness to work on a common good with people of various social, ethnic, professional, religious and other origin' (Putnam 2000). Bonding and bridging capital refer to horizontal links. Linking capital describes vertical relationships between groups of individuals and external actors beyond peer boundaries, with the objective of gaining resources, ideas and information. Linking capital may also enable individuals to transcend their traditional spheres (Woolcock 2001).

group is often a unique opportunity to expand the network of their original contacts beyond the given locality, and build internally 'bridging' relations, i.e. within that religious group. The learning of new social skills and the possibility of being socially active offered by many religious groups to their converts gives a similar 'bridging' impression (considering the initial state). Hence, the definition of 'bridging capital' is rather relative.

4. RELIGIOUS PATHS OF CHANGE?

The inclusion of socially excluded and ethnically marginalised Roma through religion is a dynamic process influenced by a variety of factors. Based on our research, we consider the following factors as those with the biggest impact (see Fig. 1): 1. type of religious group (with the initial pro-inclusive or pro-exclusive potential), 2. pastoral discourse (inclusive or exclusive), 3. social effectiveness of the mission (intensity/extent of positive social change), 4. type of social network within the religious group (open or closed, with prevailing strong or weak ties), and 5. type of social capital that can be acquired by the group members (bonding or bridging, eventually linking capital).

With regard to this typology, the biggest effect of inclusion is expected to be produced by churches and religious groups which enter the religious scene with a high initial pro-inclusive potential, use an inclusive pastoral discourse, generate an intensive and stable social change in their converts, come with an offer for an open social network with prevailing weak social ties, and offer to their members the possibility to accumulate a bridging (eventually linking) social capital.

On the other hand, the smallest effect in the social inclusion of Roma believers occurs in the case of churches and religious groups with an initial pro-exclusive potential, with a prevailing exclusive pastoral discourse, those reporting small success in achieving an intensive social change among their followers and offering predominantly closed social networks with strong social ties producing mainly a bonding social capital.

Fig. 1. Factors with the biggest impact on inclusion or exclusion of marginalized Roma through religion

Inclusion	Exclusion
Denomination with a high pro-inclusive potential	Denomination with a high pro-exclusive potential
Inclusive pastoral discourse	Exclusive pastoral discourse
Effectiveness in causing an intensive and stabile positive social change	Ineffectiveness in causing a positive social change
Offer of open secondary social network with prevalence of weak ties	Offer of closed secondary social network with prevalence of strong ties
Possibility of accumulation of bridging (eventually linking) social capital	Accumulation of bonding capital

This 'ideal' combination of pro-inclusive or pro-exclusive factors is very rare in practice; more frequently we encounter various other combinations which shape the final effect.

If we examine the 'input' pro-inclusive and pro-exclusive potentials of the different churches and religious groups working among the Roma, we would find that the subse-

quent factors can either strengthen these groups or completely eliminate them. For example, the entry of socially excluded Roma into religious groups with a pro-inclusive potential (big, traditional, registered, majority, locally dominant churches) can cause a large accumulation of their bridging capital, even under the condition that their positive social change is not intensive. Under certain conditions, weak ties can be considerably strengthened. However, this effect occurs only when the local religious group is an open social network ready and willing to accept socially excluded Roma members. In such cases, it is very important to conduct an inclusive pastoral discourse opening the religious community to all ethnic and social groups. In that situation, work with the Roma community and with the general population is equally important.

On the other hand, the entrance of socially excluded Roma into religious groups with an initial pro-exclusive potential (small, non-traditional, non-registered, minority, locally irrelevant churches) usually leads to a considerable accumulation or strengthening of the 'bonding capital' – the Roma establish new kinds of contacts within their families (redefinition of marital roles, marital communication, etc.), as well as within the locally excluded community (conversions usually take place along family or parentage lines, which considerably reinforces more distant family ties, too). Involvement in a 'hybrid social network' which, in a way, maintains the nature of a primary social network and works as a classical secondary network, not only enhances 'strong ties', but considerably increases the number of weak ties, because the Roma can, within religious groups, meet Roma from other locally excluded communities. In some particular cases, more extensive contacts between Roma from different localities (as a result of religious assembly visits – 'weak ties') lead to an increased number of marriages within them and, in some cases, between non-Roma and Roma believers.[46] Local inter-connection of isolated Roma communities results in a natural intensification of relations within an ethnic community of people who look for ways out from social exclusion by various paths, seek practical experience and guidelines to cope positively with critical situations produced on a daily basis in a socially excluded community which is willing to learn the unwritten rules of the new group and improve their social skills and acquire new competencies. From this point of view, the accumulation of 'bonding capital' in an open religious group with an offer of weak ties can be an important task in the lives of individuals seeking their own 'way out from poverty'. The research showed that even religious groups with an initial pro-exclusive potential can considerably increase the extent of social inclusion of their members thanks to the intensive effect of a positive social change and inclusive pastoral discourse. To a certain degree, social inclusion in these cases increases also as a result of the time factor, but social inclusion would not be possible without concrete cases of a successful social change and pro-inclusive pastoral discourse. In some localities, for example, the general population started to view the Roma positively and stated that one of the principal causes of this positive change leading to inclusion was the fact that many Roma had converted to a concrete small church in the 1970s and 1980s and this church now includes members of a second or even third generation of the first converts.[47]

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[46] "(I met my wife) at the congress, there will be another one soon; this is where the communities from all regions meet, from Košice, from the East... and where young people meet, get acquainted, where they see each other, all of them... and this is where I met my wife. (...) My mother is white, my father is an ethnic Hungarian and I married a Roma" (SIRONA 2010, non-Roma believer). For more details see Hrustič 2011: 25.

[47] 'It's a pity that you're only doing a research, because it would be good to publish what we're doing here,

On the other hand, the closed character of the group and an exclusive pastoral discourse[48] can largely eliminate the effect of a positive social change and enhance the initial pro-exclusive potential. During the research, we also observed localities where no social inclusion occurs in spite of a positive social change. If a locally dominant church also becomes active in such a locality and both of them prefer an exclusive pastoral discourse as a part of their rival fight, this automatically leads to polarization[49] and deepening of barriers (between the Roma and the non-Roma population) even though the converted Roma have experienced long-term social changes.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Religious change can be a particularly effective social tool. Unlike other (secular) social tools, religious change involves some specific features which determine its social effect. The SIRONA 2010 research showed that religious change has a high potential for social change. The set of 14 indicators of social inclusion showed at least 80% success rate in the subjective perception of social change. Positively perceived social change has a high potential for social inclusion into mainstream society (in terms of relatively low initial financial and personal inputs). The key factor of social change is participation in a social network/group.

Religious communities come to socially excluded communities with specific offers of social networks that allow the Roma to participate in their structures. Together with the feeling of personal assurance (from the religious perspective) it brings about a significant increase in their social skills and competencies that does not disappear even after eventual departure from the religious community. After Roma join local religious groups, the nature of their social networks and the quality of their social capital is changed. Both of these factors are particularly important in the context of the lack of economic capital (financial resources, access to employment, etc.) typical for socially excluded Roma communities. Many religious communities come up with an offer of social networks where the Roma have an opportunity to develop their 'Romipen' (religious songs in the Romani language, Romani as pastoral language, empowering of Roma leaders, etc.). Social inclusion in this case takes place rather at the level of social bridging of previously isolated local Roma communities.

However, research also showed that an accompanying phenomenon of socialisation within the religious community can strengthen local barriers and polarise the local Roma

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that our Gypsies should become an example for Slovakia as a whole. And it's because the majority of them are Jehovists and this is what changed them. They don't drink, don't smoke and don't go to pubs. Their only problem is that they don't have a job, but in fact, nobody has a job here. But they have very nice houses, cars, they're orderly... As for the co-existence between us and them here in our village, it's not a problem. They are even coming to live here, I don't know why; many young people – they marry (sic), and their partners come to live here...' (SIRONA 2010, external observer). (In this case, we did not make the denomination anonymous).

[48] „Until recently, the majority saw them as a Gypsy settlement, and now they see them as a Gypsy settlement with a sect. And the Roma see them as follows: it was a majority that rejected us; and now it is a majority that, moreover, has a bad church" (SIRONA 2010, external observer).

[49] It is interesting that potential polarisation is sometimes perceived as positive and is interpreted through Biblical symbolism. For more details see, for example, Hrustičová 2010: 101.

community and majority community. If the religious community acts as a closed elite club, its membership can become a source of new conflicts. In this case, religious change produces social change, but this change is counterproductive – it causes a deepening of social exclusion on local level. In specific cases of locally unknown, unregistered or non-traditional religious movements this may result in multiplication of socially pro-exclusive factors.

As a conclusion of this research project we would like to emphasise that in the present situation some churches and religious communities carry out successful social work (although not ordered by the state) and contribute to social change of their members in some localities in Slovakia. Although the total numbers and overall coverage cannot be compared with the total number of excluded Roma in Slovakia, the fact remains that there are not many similar functioning social tools. We believe that, given the social efficiency of religious change, it is appropriate to perceive it as an additional social tool for social inclusion of excluded and marginalised Roma. In some instances it is even possible, by strengthening its most effective elements (such as a comprehensive approach and work with all age groups at the community level), to use these examples in developing efficient, professional and usable secular social tools.

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