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Civic Participation and the Syndrome of Shifts in Life Orientation in Polish Society

The essence of diagnosing the functioning of civil society in a given community should be a reference to the historical specificity determining the cultural basis of its citizenship. The perspective of social culture “in the practice of everyday life,” which has been formed at a specific time and by strictly historical processes (or more precisely, modernization), helps to avoid surprises that sometimes arise from the collision of research ideas with facts. Thus in this article we will try to present, as concisely as possible, a panorama of Poles’ civil engagement through the lens of life orientations, as a manifestation of socio-cultural transitions in Poland.

Developments within the NGO sector and its immediate environment could cause the weakening of civic engagement in regard to institutions and could result in flight into the realm of non-institutional citizenship. The main reasons for such a flight are institutional pressure, preoccupation with grants, the economic differentiation of participants in an organization (a ubiquitous phenomenon, revealing the divisions between members of even the same organization), the myth of civil anointment (verified by the organization’s prosaic activity and struggle for survival), and conformity to the market and government sector. The de-homogenization of civil society in the direction of balancing institutional and non-institutional activities is a manifestation of customizing civil activities to locality and is also the outcome of interference in Poles’ life orientations and existential routines.

Key words: civil society, democracy, life orientations, social trust, social and political transformation