



RELIGION AS A PATH TO CHANGE?

The Possibilities of Social Inclusion
of the Roma in Slovakia

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Tatiana Podolinská / Tomáš Hrustič

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TATIANA PODOLINSKÁ/TOMÁŠ HRUSTIČ

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PREFACE

This study provides, for the first time, a detailed overview of the work of large, small, registered and non-registered churches and religious movements among the Roma in Slovakia. It also outlines their possibilities and effectiveness related to the social inclusion of Roma. At the global level, pastoral outreach among the Roma cannot substitute state programmes aimed at the inclusion of Roma into the society. However, an extensive academic research in Slovakia¹ showed that missionary work, along with other state programmes, can be viewed as a potentially extraordinarily effective social tool (considering the relation between the spent financial resources and the final effect of change).

In the majority of cases, socially excluded Roma are concentrated in localities without a functioning labour market and with a limited offer of social networks even for the majority population. Thus, membership in a religious group is the only possibility for many socially excluded Roma to participate in a social network, obtain new social skills and competences, and extend their personal contacts network outside of their family and the socially excluded community. The extension and change in the social capital quality, and the presentation of positive examples and effective ways of solving crisis situations within a religious group provides the Roma living in social insecurity with an important feeling of personal security and human dignity. The research confirmed that a religious change is also accompanied by a social change. In the case of a successful mission, we usually face a positive social change which is positively evaluated not only by the Roma converts as such, but also by the non-Roma members of the majority community.

This study should only be considered as a probe for testing one of the possible tools to achieve social change. It was not our aim to compare the effectiveness of this tool with other social instruments, and in no case we claim that secular instruments are inefficient. Vice versa. Among other things, we point out in this study another – a religious – aspect of social change which can become the source of new conflicts in crisis communities and, in the end, can deepen their social exclusion. We should also not forget that missionary work is primarily a church tool designed to achieve religious change. Social change is rather perceived as a side product; though a positive, but only a secondary phenomenon. Moreover, the social dimension of missionary work is more a voluntary, personal decision of a concrete pastor/priest than a systematic (more massive) church strategy. The wide-spectrum social services provided by the representatives of churches and religious groups to the Roma living in excluded Roma communities in Slovakia is to a large extent an inevitable part of their every-day work. It is often a decision given by the situation faced by pastors and priests after their arrival to socially excluded Roma communities. Also for this reason it should be noted that the effectiveness of social change is, in this particular case, largely dependent on personal charisma of the bearer of religious change, and is based on voluntary work

1 The project with acronym 'SIRONA 2010'. For more details on the project in Slovak see <http://www.uet.sav.sk/projekty/granty.htm> and the publication Podolinská, Hrustič 2010.

and huge investment of personal energy. In a certain sense, it is hardly reproducible and it can not be generalised as a systemic tool for social change.

Another pitfall in pastoral outreach is the tying of social change to religious change, which can, to a certain degree, influence its stability. What we can face here is the 'religious burn-out' syndrome, which causes 'social burn-out' as a secondary effect. Another problem is the limited social possibilities of applying the achieved social change, since a religious group is not able to ensure enough possibilities for its 'socially changed members' to change the social roles leading to a change in their social status. In the end, a religious change can also result in social passivity.

The research also showed that socialisation within a religious group can be accompanied by the deepening of local barriers and polarisation both within the Roma community and the municipality. If a religious group behaves as a closed elite club, membership in that group can become a source of new conflicts. In such case, although religious change produces a social change, it is counterproductive, i.e. social exclusion would deepen under the given local conditions. In specific cases related to the activities of local non-registered or non-traditional minor organisations, the excluding factors can multiply: the current stigmatising label 'Gipsy' (Tsigan) would acquire a new stigma – the religious label 'sectarian'.

The effectiveness of social change through religion can also be dependent on an acute lack of social services in crisis communities. In such case, social services provided within religious groups substitute systemic, professional and generally applicable state tools in a 'lay' (amateur, non-professional) and selective (in a selected number of communities) manner and on a voluntary basis (depending on the good will of a concrete person).

Based on a relevant sample, our research showed that in the current situation churches and religious groups are carrying out very successful social work (though not ordered by the state) and have achieved a positive social change in their members in some Slovak localities. Although the overall numbers and the territorial scope may appear as 'negligible' compared to the total number of Roma, the truth is that in the given situation we do not dispose of too many social tools that would work in practice. We believe that, with regard to the social effectiveness of a religious change, it is suitable to view it as a supplementary social tool. Considering all its specific features, it is even possible to work with this tool and use its most effective elements (for example, a complex approach and work with all age groups at the community level) in the development of effective state (secular) social tools.

This is where we also see the potential of applying the findings of this study, as it tests the effectiveness of social change through religion in an unprejudiced manner and identifies both the positive (*pro-inclusive*) and negative (*pro-exclusive*) factors.

If we were to define (beyond the objectives of our modest study) the general features of the most efficient model to achieve not only an effective, but also a *stable social change* leading to a change in social roles and in the social status, we would recommend a combination of two types of social change.

Social practice identifies two basic strategies focused on social inclusion. Both of them work with social change, but differ in the object of action. The first strategy primarily seeks a change in people ('change inside'), and the second primarily focuses on changing the environment ('change outside').

The commonly used social inclusion tools usually work with the change vector *from outside to inside*; simply said, it is an effort to achieve change in people by changing the external environment. The means of social inclusion defined in this way usually require a huge amount of time, financial resources and personnel, as well as systematic and long-term measures. Moreover, not even a highly significant change in the environment can automatically lead to the desired effect of internal change, i.e. it does not necessarily take pro-passivity oriented people to pro-activity and to the will to participate in the new system. Yet, pro-activity (change inside) and participation are the key factors given for the sustainability/stability and self-reproduction of the newly introduced external system.

The other type of social instrument works with the change vector *from inside to outside*.² First, it is people who change, and people subsequently change their social world: they transform their relationship with their environment and newly define their external societal space. A social instrument with such orientation is usually not so demanding in terms of time, finances and personnel. Another benefit of this instrument is the fact that people create their external system on their own and are identified with it because they design it in line with their visions. The disadvantage of this tool is the limited possibilities to bring system solutions to the changed social roles and social statuses in the 'external world' for its clients. Not even a significant change 'inside' can be, under unfavourable conditions, demonstrated 'outside', since the possibilities of building and transforming the life world of the Roma within socially excluded communities are extremely limited. The impossibility to apply pro-activity in the external world can be counterproductive and, in the end, cause a return to pro-passivity.

From the point of view of *effectiveness and sustainability* of social change in socially excluded Roma communities in Slovakia, the parallel application of both approaches perceived as complementary ones is the key factor.

We believe that the situation described on the basis of our research project in Slovakia is relevant also in a wider context – to all European countries. We affirm that the primordial task for all these countries is to know and use effectively the existing social instruments. It is equally important to inter-link these social instruments to achieve a synergy effect. This study can become a practical guideline for the decision-making sphere as to the evaluation of impacts, effectiveness of their own measures and practices related to the social inclusion of Roma into the society.

Tatiana Podolinská and Tomáš Hrustič
(Institute of Ethnology SAS, Bratislava)

² Pastoral outreach is a specific example of this type of social instrument. 'Religious change' is based exactly on the fundamental change from inside to outside.

ABSTRACT

According to a thorough sociographic mapping of Roma communities in Slovakia, there are approximately 320,000 Roma in the country. As per this estimate, half of these Roma live integrated with the majority, and the other half is concentrated in settlements with various degrees of segregation and marginalization from the general population. The Roma in Slovakia live in isolated rural settlements and urban ghettos impoverished to various degrees of generational and segregated poverty.

The research project mapping the effectiveness of social inclusion of Roma in the SR through religion has brought the following findings:

- + A religious change has a high potential of producing a social change;
- + The key moment of social change is social involvement in a social network/group;
- + Religious groups are coming to socially excluded communities with a specific offer for social networks which enable Roma participation in their structures. Besides an increased feeling of personal security (on a religious basis), their social skills and competences are also enhanced and do not disappear after they leave the religious group;
- + The success of social inclusion of Roma into the majority (recipient) society/group depends not only on achieving a positive social change of socially excluded Roma, but also on the 'openness' of this group and its endeavours to integrate the excluded groups into both local communities and the general Slovak population;
- Social change does not automatically lead to social inclusion of Roma;
- A religious change may bring along a deepening of social exclusion; in cases when a religious group uses an exclusive pastoral discourse in its missionary work, this results in a deepening of social polarisations and in a rise of obstacles;
- Pastoral outreach is a church tool primarily designed to achieve a religious change. Social change is, in this case, a 'side product'. Pastoral outreach is not a systemic tool to achieve a social change, and cannot substitute state social policies;

With regard to the social effectiveness of religious change, it is useful to perceive it as a supplementary social instrument. Considering all its specific features, its most effective elements (for example, a complex approach to and work with all age groups at the community level) can be used in the development of effective professional and systemic state social instruments.

SUMMARY

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* (SIRONA 2010). 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.³

OBJECTIVES

This study⁴ is a summary of two researches conducted in the framework of the SIRONA 2010 project, namely: 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,⁵ and to find out whether such change leads to social inclusion.

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 several 'parallel' samples; not only the very actors of religious change were our target group, 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).⁶ We rather sought answers to the questions: what changes 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 'subject-

3 For the researchers' team and localities of research, see Podolinská, Hrustič, 2010.

4 The study was also supported by the VEGA Grant no. 2/0014/11 *Roma in majority society: the research of models of mutual cohabitation*.

5 *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 comprises processes of a personal (group) religious 'cool-down'. In the questionnaires obtained under the SIRONA 2010 research, the respondents, when defining 'religious change', often used terms, such as 'spiritual convictionment', 'consolidation of faith', 'more active engagement in the religious group's activities', 'change in the spiritual life', or 'spiritual change'.

6 In spite of speaking often about *social inclusion* in this study, we are of the opinion that *social change* would be a more appropriate term for this phenomenon. Social inclusion can be or needs not to be the final effect of such change. Hence, a social change is a change in social habits, competences, skills and behaviour of an individual or a group. For more details, refer to note no. 39.

tive extent' (perceptual extent) of perceiving a social change by the Roma actors as such and by the non-Roma fellow citizens that forms the basic prerequisite enabling the '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, standing on 'subjective foundations', are the most frequent reasons for the social exclusion of Roma in Slovakia, the research of change in *subjective perception on both sides* was a principal issue for us.

DATA SUMMARY

In the framework of the SIRONA 2010 research project, we contacted 30 churches and organisations⁸ with potential religious activities in the Roma communities in Slovakia, and we found out that 19 of them are active among the Roma (see Chapter 2.1 of this study). 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 a field research.⁹ These localities represent places where various churches and religious movements run 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 municipality 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 an every-day basis. A total of 225 (285) interviews¹⁰ 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 comprised recommendations which we split into four groups according to the different types of stakeholders – church, state administration, self-government and non-governmental organisations.¹¹

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 See Podolinská, Hrustič, 2010. 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.

10 The number in the parenthesis represents the sum of interviews, observations and final reports collected by students in the framework of the research.

11 For a more detailed description of concrete recommendations, refer to the final recommendations of this study, Chapter 6.

1. INTRODUCTION

The active missionary works of various churches and religious movements in Roma communities are being increasingly discussed in Slovakia. Preliminary information from such communities or from partial researches¹² indicated that many of these missions have/had an impact on changing the way of life of the Roma living in socially excluded communities. It was supposed that one of the 'side' effects of religious conversion would be that of a 'positive social change'¹³ enabling social inclusion.

1.1 ROMA AND RELIGIOUSNESS IN THE SR

The Slovak Republic is a multi-ethnic country¹⁴ with minorities making up approximately 20 per cent of the population. Even though the legislative conditions are the same for all ethnic minorities, the truth is that the general population views Roma as the most distinct ethnic group. The social perception of the 'otherness of the Roma' reaches such level that we commonly talk about the 'Roma issue' (or 'Roma problem') today.¹⁵

As several social researches indicate, anti-Roma mood in the Slovak society is on the rise,¹⁶ which is undoubtedly given by the predominantly negative image of the Roma presented by the Slovak media. Several field researches¹⁷ also affirmed that the general population has little information about the actual life of Roma, and has the tendency to work with the group label of 'lazy' and 'inadaptable' Roma living at the expense of the majority.

The lack of information is also manifested in the formulation of opinions on 'Roma's religiousness'. The majority population tends to 'measure' any religiousness by its own criteria which it considers general. Since the predominant – traditional religion in Slovakia is Catholicism,¹⁸ the society knowingly or unknowingly perceives the criteria of the 'right religiousness' on the basis of the religiousness criteria common for this confession.

12 Kováč, Jurík, 2002; Kováč, Mann (Eds.), 2003; Plachá, 2007; Podolinská, 2003a, b, 2009a, b; Grešková (Ed.), 2009.

13 *Positive social change*, as perceived in this study, is a social change positively reflected either by the actors of change or by impartial observers. Hence, it means a positive perception of a social change.

14 According to the *Slovak Census results from 2001*, the Roma nationality (ethnicity) was claimed by 89,920 persons. See <http://portal.statistics.sk>.

15 It is a generally used term used especially by the media. See, for example, *Domino fórum* 33 of 16 August 2001, interviews with Michal Vašečka and Arne B. Mann, or *Romano nevo Ťil* of 29 March 2004 (Braňo Oláh).

16 The findings of the *European Values Study 1999* represent an exception; see <http://sasd.sav.sk/sk>.

17 Podolinská, Hrustič, 2010; Kováč, Mann (Eds.), 2003; Podolinská, 2003 a,b etc.

18 According to the *Slovak Census results from 2001*, Roman-Catholic faith was claimed by 1,760,553 persons. Source: <http://portal.statistics.sk>, tab. 159.

Just as the majority population, a predominant part of the Roma in Slovakia¹⁹ claims the Catholic religion. Although almost all Roma consider themselves as believers, they go to church rarely.²⁰ In fact, a significant part of the Roma community²¹ does not live an intra-church life,²² and almost does not attend at all collective religious ceremonies. These phenomena are sometimes viewed as voluntary demonstrations of the specific features of Roma religiousness ('religiousness without church'). As a result, the majority is inclined,²³ often on the basis of stereotypes and prejudices, to interpret Roma religiousness as formal.²⁴

Many of the 'specific features' of Roma religiousness result from their non-participation in the majority cult. However, their non-participation is directly given by their status – social and societal. Social exclusion thus produces a situation-conditioned religious exclusion. In some localities we can even speak about direct or indirect religious discrimination of Roma by the majority/majority churches.

Many of the 'specific features' of Roma religiousness also arises from the insufficient exchange of information and value-sharing with the majority population. Socially excluded Roma communities produce a special system of unwritten rules which reflect to a large extent the social status of these groups in the local communities.

In this context, it is proper to speak about three basic components of modern religiousness (both general and Roma religiousness): 1. Membership; 2. Participation (involvement in church activities; and 3. Faith. The final shape of religiousness (either collective or individual) largely reflects the mutual relationship and the form of emphasis put on the individual components. For example, some currents in non-traditional religiousness (also among traditional confessions) put the greatest emphasis on private faith; participation in church activities is rather voluntary than obligatory and membership is the least important component of

19 According to the *Slovak Census results from 2001*, 68.9 per cent of the Slovak population claimed the Roman-Catholic faith. The same tendency can be observed among the Roma population. Out of 89,920 persons who claimed the Roma ethnicity, up to 76 per cent declared that are members of the Roman-Catholic Church. Source: www.rokovania.sk/appl/material/nsf.

20 See field researches conducted by the authors of this study.

21 Referring to the so-called 'settlement Roma'.

22 Meaning regular attendance of Sunday services, receipt of sacraments, etc.

23 The majority assumes that the Roma are unstable in their faith, they flame up fast for faith and their faith burns down fast, as well; the majority also thinks that the Roma prefer domestic and private manifestations of faith, i.e. individualised expressions of religiousness to collective or formal affiliation to the dominating religion, or that they claim faith for profit-seeking reasons. However, the SIRONA 2010 research refuted these stereotypes; we found out that various religious groups in many Slovak localities report high stability of membership among the Roma, and in many localities they attend collective activities of the individual churches (masses, pilgrimages) en masse. This interest is directly proportional to the 'opening' of churches to the Roma. Their formal or 'register' religiousness often depends on their 'religious exclusion' which copies their social and societal exclusion. The Roma lead an intensive spiritual life (private faith) even 'outside church'. Moreover, with experience in practical pastoral outreach, many church communities can confirm that the Roma are able to provide unworldly voluntary work for their own church community. They are also willing to participate in the activities of their church and contribute financially to its running (in spite of their bad social situation).

24 See field researches conducted by the authors of this study.

religiousness – sometimes even not registered. Often, as a direct consequence of ‘religious exclusion’, the Roma become members of the locally predominant religion, but their further involvement in church activities is minimal and is rather limited to the ‘transition’ sacraments of christening, marriage and funeral.²⁵ The SIRONA 2010 research implied that this situation is in many localities caused, among other things, by the disinterest of majority confessions in working with the Roma and a more active inclusion of the Roma in the local religious life. Even though it is often perceived in this manner, it is not correct to say that the Roma are not identified internally with the majority religions; rather, they are not identified internally with the predominant *model of practising* religion which they consider to be reserved exclusively for the majority.

1.2 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK – REGISTERED AND NON-REGISTERED CHURCHES IN THE SR

As the research implies, the status of a registered or non-registered church has a direct impact on the form of concrete religious missions and, hence, it is directly related to the possibility of social inclusion of the Roma.

The activities of churches and religious groups in the Slovak Republic are governed by Act No. 308/1991, which was amended twice: by Act No. 394/2000 Coll. and Act No. 201/2007 Coll. In 1991, 14 churches and religious groups were registered, which were recognised prior to the adoption of this Act.²⁶ Until 2007, four more churches and religious groups were registered in Slovakia.²⁷

Under this Act, the SR guarantees religious freedom and free dissemination of religious faith. The Act also stipulates the right to freely change one’s religion or to be without a faith, and establishes equal legal status of registered churches and religious groups (Art. 4, par. 2). The state may sign agreements on mutual cooperation with churches (Art. 4, par. 5). Under par. 4 of the same Article, the state only recognises registered churches and religious groups. According to

25 See field researches of the authors of this study (e.g. Podolinská, 2007, etc.).

26 List of then registered churches in alphabetical order: Apostolic Church, Brethren Church, Brethren Unity of Baptists, Central Union of Jewish Communities in the Slovak Republic, Christian Corps, Czechoslovak Hussite Church, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, Greek Catholic Church, Methodist Evangelical Church, Orthodox Church, Reformed Christian Church, Roman Catholic Church, Old Catholic Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church. Source: <http://www.civil.gov.sk/archiv/casopis/2002/1312zc.htm>.

27 According to the official website of the Ministry of Culture of the SR (<http://www.culture.gov.sk/cirkev-a-nabozenske-spolocnosti/registrovane-cirkvi>), in chronological order as per date of registration: Religious Community Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Slovak Republic (registered in March 1993), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the Slovak Republic (registered in October 2006), Baha’i Community in the Slovak Republic (registered in April 2007). In September 2001, the New Apostolic Church in Slovakia was recognised on the basis of registration and of a certification that the Secretariat of the Government of SSR for Church Affairs of 06 June 1989 approved the extension of the scope of activities of the New Apostolic Church in the territory of the Capital City of SSR Bratislava. On the basis of this decision, the New Apostolic Church was recognised together with other churches already in 1991. Source: Ministry of Interior of the SR: <http://www.civil.gov.sk/archiv/casopis/2002/1312zc.htm>.

the recent amendment law of 2007, the registration of churches and religious groups 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 ones among the European Union Member States, and it provoked many expert and public discussions at the time of entering into effect.²⁸ This large number of members represents an insuperable obstacle to the registration of churches, since even the majority of registered churches and religious groups in Slovakia fails to meet this requirement.^{29,30}

Registered churches in the SR 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 (Art. 6, Act No. 201/2007 Coll.), and marry couples, whereas such marriages have the same legal status as marriages contracted in a civil manner. The other rights and obligations are defined in several documents, for example, in the *Treaty between the Slovak Republic and Registered Churches and Religious Groups* of 2002,³¹ or in the *Agreement between the Slovak Republic and Registered Churches and Religious Groups on Religious Education* of 2004.³² One of the mostly discussed issues governed by the Slovak legislation in relation to churches and religious groups is the right of registered churches and religious

28 20,000 members as a requirement for registration was, among other things, criticised by an EU expert group of lawyers who denoted it as discriminatory (http://www.eheca.sk/aktualne/2006_05_22_europski_pravnici_kritizuju_slovensky_zakon_o_registracii_cirkvi.html); the amendment act No. 201/2007 ended up as a case filed at the Constitutional Court of the SR, which ruled in February 2010 that this requirement was not unconstitutional (<http://www.sme.sk/c/5223176/prisnejsia-registracia-cirkvi-nie-je-protiustavna.html>). For media discussion see, for example, (<http://www.sme.sk/c/5605331/zakon-hodil-moslimov-do-vreca-so-sektami.html>).

29 According to the data of the Statistical Office of the SR (on the basis of the *Slovak Census results from 2001*, only five big churches have a claimed membership of 20,000 or more persons over 15 years of age: Roman Catholic Church (2,993,036), Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (321,455), Greek Catholic Church (176,845), Reformed Christian Church (92,049) and Orthodox Church (40,648). Close to meeting this quantity requirement is the Religious Community Jehovah's Witnesses, affiliation to which was claimed by 16,975 persons over 15 years of age in 2001. The majority of registered churches does not have more than 5,000 members each. Source: http://portal.statistics.sk/files/Sekcie/sek_600/Demografia/SODB/Tabulky/tab13.pdf. For more details on the use of the terms 'big churches' and 'small churches' in this study refer to notes no. 46 and 47.

30 Hence, it can be affirmed that we have limited religious pluralism in Slovakia, privileging big 'traditional' churches.

31 Source: Ministry of Culture of the SR: <http://www.culture.gov.sk/cirkev-nabozenske-spolocnosti/legislatva/zkony/zmluva-medzi-slovenskou-republikou-a-registrovanymi-cirkvami-a-nabozenskymi-spolocnostami>.

32 Source: Ministry of Culture of the SR: <http://www.culture.gov.sk/cirkev-nabozenske-spolocnosti/legislatva/zkony/dohoda-medzi-slovenskou-republikou-a-registrovanymi-cirkvami-a-nabozenskymi>.

groups to receive financial resources³³ from the state budget of the SR to cover the salaries of clergymen and various material costs.³⁴

Religious movements that fail to meet the registration requirements are run as civic associations or as a part of other organisations.

33 The financial framework for this legislation is specified in the Act No. 218 from the year 1949, which was amended several times; the latest amendments are incorporated in the Act No. 467/2005 Coll. in effect since 01 January 2006. Source: Ministry of Culture of the SR: <http://www.culture.gov.sk/cirkev-nabozenske-spolocnosti/legislatva/zkony/218/1949>.

34 'Not all registered churches and religious groups in Slovakia request money from the state budget. Five of the eighteen registered churches refuse state subsidies. The entitlement to a state budget subsidy to cover the salaries of clergymen and headquarters operation is not exercised, for predominantly doctrinal reasons, by the Religious Community Jehovah's Witnesses in the Slovak Republic, Christian Corps in Slovakia, New Apostolic Church in the Slovak Republic, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the Slovak Republic, and the Baha'i Community in the Slovak Republic. The New Apostolic Church plans to receive financial resources from the state budget for the running of its headquarters next year. The Church of Seventh Day Adventists – Slovak Association also receives money to operate its church headquarters. This church considers applying for money to cover the costs of clergymen's salaries, too.' Quoted from SITA press releases, 21 August 2010. Source: <http://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko/peniaze-od-statu-nechce-5-registrovan/204472-clanok.html>.

2. MAPPING OF THE SITUATION IN THE SR

2.1 THE ACTIVITIES OF CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN ROMA COMMUNITIES

On the basis of the first mapping part of the research, we found out that 14 registered churches and five non-registered religious movements currently work among the Roma in Slovakia.³⁵

The following registered churches and religious groups conduct activities among the Roma:

- Apostolic Church (Slovak branch of Assemblies of God) (1)
- Baha'í (2)
- Brethren Unity of Baptists (3)
- Seventh Day Adventists (4)
- Brethren Church (5)
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (6)
- Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (Lutheran Church) (7)
- Evangelical Methodist Church (United Methodist Church) (8)
- The Greek Catholic Church (9)
- Watchtower Society – Jehovah's Witnesses (10)
- Orthodox Church (11)
- Reformed Christian Church (12)
- Roman Catholic Church (Salesians of Don Bosco) (13)
- Old Catholic Church.³⁶ (14)

³⁵ Naturally, this number is dynamic; at the time of writing this study (one year after conducting the field research), the civic association Čistý život (Pure Life), avowing the Scientology Church teachings, carried out community activities in the Roma settlement in Jasov (Kosice-okolie district) for some months. For more details see, for example: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Cesta-ku-%C5%A1%C5%A5astiu/150104991679373>.

³⁶ Original Slovak names as registered, in the order according to the text: 1. *Apoštolská cirkev* (Apostolic Church), 2. *Bahájske spoločenstvo v SR* (Baha'í Community in the SR), 3. *Bratská jednota baptistov* (Brethren Unity of Baptists), 4. *Cirkev adventistov siedmeho dňa* (Seventh Day Adventist Church), 5. *Cirkev bratská* (Brethren Church), 6. *Cirkev Ježiša Krista Svätých neskorších dní* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints), 7. *Evanjelická cirkev augsburgského vyznania* (Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession), 8. *Evanjelická cirkev metodistická* (Methodist Evangelical Church), 9. *Gréckokatolícka cirkev* (Greek Catholic Church), 10. *Náboženská spoločnosť Jehovovi svedkovia v SR* (Religious Community Jehovah's Witnesses in the SR), 11. *Pravoslávna cirkev* (Orthodox Church), 12. *Reformovaná kresťanská cirkev* (Reformed Christian Church), 13. *Rímskokatolícka cirkev* (Roman Catholic Church), 14. *Starokatolícka cirkev* (Old Catholic Church).

The following non-registered churches and religious movement are active among the Roma:

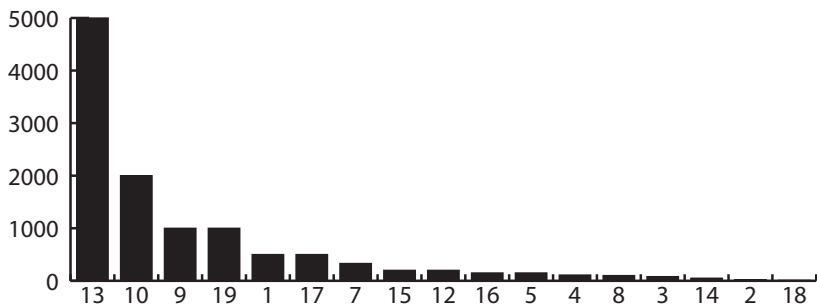
- Devleskero Kher' (Pentecostals) (15)
- Christian communities 'House of Faith' and 'Romani Archa' (Pentecostals) (16)
- Word of Life (17)
- Christian community 'Joyful Heart' (Pentecostals) (18)
- 'Maranata' (Pentecostals).³⁷ (19)

2.2 ESTIMATED NUMBERS OF ROMA INVOLVED IN THE MISSIONS

According to internal estimates of the different churches, Roma missions influenced the lives of about 10,000 Slovak Roma.

As for the number of persons influenced by the different missions, the following five churches are most relevant to the Roma: Roman Catholic Church; Religious Community Jehovah's Witnesses; Greek Catholic Church; Maranata Christian Mission; and Apostolic Church. According to the internal estimates of the Roman Catholic Church, its mission concerns about 5,000 religiously active Roma; Jehovah's Witnesses reach out to around 2,000 Roma; the Greek Catholic Church actively works with about a thousand of Roma, just like the Maranata movement working in the Spiš region; and the Apostolic Church reaches out to about 500 Roma. From among other churches and religious movements, Roma are also involved in the activities of the movement Word of Life, the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, Pentecostal, and the charismatic movements Devleskero Kher and Romani Archa, as well as the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and the Methodist Evangelical Church. Mainly in relation to the work of big churches, it should be noted that the research only focused on active missions working in Roma communities.

Figure 1: Number of religiously active Roma



(The data on the Roman Catholic Church comprises the data of Salesians of Don Bosco. Prepared according to Questionnaire A; archive of SIRONA 2010 research project.)

37 Original Slovak names stated on their websites: 15. *Devleskero Kher* (The House of God), 16. *Dom viery* (House of Faith) and *Romani Archa*, 17. *Slovo života* (Word of Life), 18. *Radostné srdce* (Joyful Heart), 19. *Maranata*.

2.3 'SUCCESS'/ 'FAILURE' AND END OF ROMA MISSIONS

In several churches we observed the end of some missions in Roma localities, and we have therefore also dealt with the reasons for the end of such missions. It turned out that in the majority of cases, the end of missions was caused by the departure of concrete priests, pastors or missionaries who had initiated the creation of such missions. These departures had various reasons, from health and personal problems to displacement upon orders 'from above'. The almost 'existential' dependence of a Roma mission on the founding priest/pastor (i.e. successful, accepted and respected by the Roma) proves the priest's/pastor's extremely important function in an effective and stable mission. A religious leader in Roma localities works with the Roma not only in 'spiritual' affairs, but their activity is very complex. In effective Roma missions, a religious leader solves many problems produced by the critical community of the socially excluded Roma – they work as psychologists, marital advisors, educational advisors, financial advisors, field social workers, and even as sexologists. The bonds between converted Roma and their religious leader are therefore very strong. Through their authority the Roma also perceive the authority of the whole church/denomination to a large extent. As a result, some Roma missions ended after the departure of the founding religious leader from the locality.

In other cases, Roma missions ended as a result of, for example, unwillingness of the majority to understand or accept the mission, or rising tension (for example, in one case related to a traditional majority church, the non-Roma population complained that the priest dealt more with the Roma than with the general population, etc.). Some other missions ended after arrival of other ('rival') churches and denominations and as a result of their more active approach to the Roma. In several localities, the missions ended or weakened due to an increased labour migration to Great Britain or to other Western European countries.

Where a church was based on the establishment of new corps and on the delegation of spiritual leaders, what happened in several cases was that the pastor delegated a local Roma leader with religious authority too early or chose an unsuitable person (with lacking charisma), etc. Incorrect or early delegation of religious authority can negatively influence the stability of Roma missions, too. The pastors themselves claim that Roma missions must be expanded in a strategic and responsible manner, because it makes no sense to establish more missions than a religious leader is able to personally run in a responsible manner.

Many churches avoid general work with the Roma, because they consider it unstable, and are afraid of fluctuations and oscillations in the interests of the Roma believers. Yet, the qualitative research showed that in most of the studied localities such thinking is often based on stereotypes and prejudices. Most missions in the studied localities were stable and successful, and these Roma communities and missions were even presented as examples to less stable, predominantly non-Roma communities.

3. IMPACT OF CHURCH ACTIVITIES ON THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF ROMA IN THE SR

The objective of the qualitative part of the study was to conduct an in-depth research in selected localities denoted by the representatives of the individual churches as successful examples of Roma missions with the purpose of finding out the actual impact of these missions on the social change and social inclusion of the Roma.

3.1 TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Although we speak about 'social inclusion' in this study³⁸ and this term is used quite frequently, we believe that it is more appropriate to speak about 'social change'.³⁹ This change, if perceived by the stakeholders and external observers as positive, has a big potential to lead to 'social inclusion'. From this point of view, social inclusion is rather a desired result of a positive social change. But as we will show later in this study, our research confirmed that a positive social change not always leads to social inclusion. Under certain conditions, the positive effect of a social change will not be necessarily manifested, or it appears with a certain delay – not only because of confessional barriers, but mainly because of numerous prejudices on both sides. Under specific circumstances, a religious change can result in the deepening of social exclusion.⁴⁰

38 *Social inclusion*: social integration of an individual or a group. An originally external/outsider/marginalised individual (group) finds himself/herself in the internal space of a majority group (society) and acquires the possibility to actually participate in the creation of its capital. Through social inclusion, the general population tries to reduce the tension/social conflict with excluded individuals or groups. In principle, it depends on the extent of closure of the internal space of the receiving group (society); in the majority of cases, without an intervention and will of the of the majority group (society) to open its internal space to outsiders social inclusion is not possible (according to Podolinská, Hrustič, 2010: 162).

39 *Social change*: change in social habits, customs, competences, skills and behaviour of an individual or group. It is a dynamic phenomenon which is defined as 'change' (as compared to the previous state) by the very actors or active initiators or passive observers of that change. In the questionnaires handed out under the SIRONA 2010 research project, respondents, when defining 'social change', often used the following terms as synonyms: 'worldly change', or 'change in the worldly life' (according to Podolinská, Hrustič, 2010: 163).

40 *Social exclusion*: social segregation of an individual or a group. It is sometimes defined as a higher level of marginalisation, but social exclusion does not need to automatically undergo the 'marginalisation phase'. A socially excluded individual (group) finds himself/herself in the external space of a majority group (general population) and is actually completely isolated from the possibility to participate in the creation of its capital. Through social exclusion, the general population reduces its internal tensions and increases its internal conformity and coherence to the prejudice of the excluded individual (group) (Podolinská, Hrustič, 2010: 162).

3.2 INDICATORS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION AND THEIR SUCCESS RATE

Since the research focused on the impact of religious missions on social change and potential social inclusion of the Roma, we established a fixed set of social inclusion indicators (SII), the frequency of which was observed in the given localities in three groups of respondents ('religious leaders', 'Roma converts', 'external observers'). Besides the often used 'hard' social inclusion indicators, such as 'employability in the labour market' or 'children's school attendance'⁴¹ (etc.), we tried to establish a 'softer' scope for the fixed set of SII in order to be able to cover less monitored changes as well, which, in fact, condition the start-up of the process of social inclusion as such. Our SII set contained indicators which tested, for example, the improvement of communication skills or the obtaining of new social competences (etc.) which detect a social change and have a high potential to lead to social inclusion. This set of indicators is largely based on the previous mapping research – the majority of these indicators was proposed by representatives of churches and religious movements on the basis of their field experience. The fixed set of SII, tested in all three target groups, contained the following 14 indicators:⁴²

SOCIAL INCLUSION INDICATORS

1. Increased school attendance of children
2. Decline in indebtedness
3. Reduced usury
4. Increased activity in seeking a job
5. Higher capacity to stay on the labour market
6. Decline in petty crime
7. Less problems with alcoholism and other narcotics
8. Less gambling and less addiction to hazardous games
9. Increased literacy rate (elimination of analphabetism)
10. Enhanced communication skills
11. Enhanced social skills
12. Increased frequency of positive contacts with other Roma (Roma from other municipalities)
13. Increased frequency of positive contacts with the general population
14. Elimination of common stereotypes
15. Other

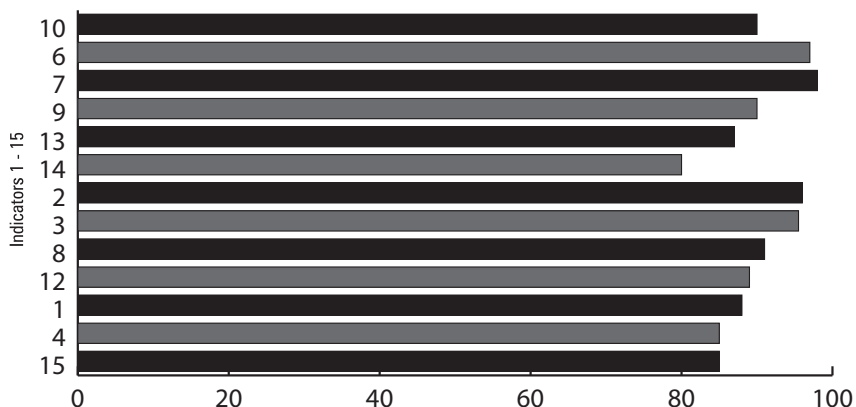
(Fixed set of social inclusion indicators tested in all types of questionnaires, SIRONA 2010 research project.)

41 The national social inclusion indicators were defined, for example, in the *National Report on the Strategies of Social Protection and Social Inclusion for the Period 2008–2010*, or in the report *Evaluation of the Suitability of the Indicators System and the of Their Use in the Operational Programme Employment and Social Inclusion*.

42 In the framework of the research, respondents weighted the fixed set of SII and determined the order of success of the individual indicators. The fixed set of indicators was open (also contained an open answer 'other'). During the research, the respondents could determine their own criteria and examples of changes that occurred under the influence of religious missions in the given localities.

After processing all the data required for the evaluation of the success rate of the fixed set of SII (i.e. in all three types of questionnaires, in three target groups and in all monitored churches and religious groups), we can affirm a success rate of min. 80 per cent of the individual indicators. Hence, a socially pro-inclusive effect of Roma missions was declared not only by the religious leaders and Roma converts, but also by non-Roma fellow citizens. In addition, it proves that the majority of respondents subjectively viewed social change as one of the effects of a religious change.

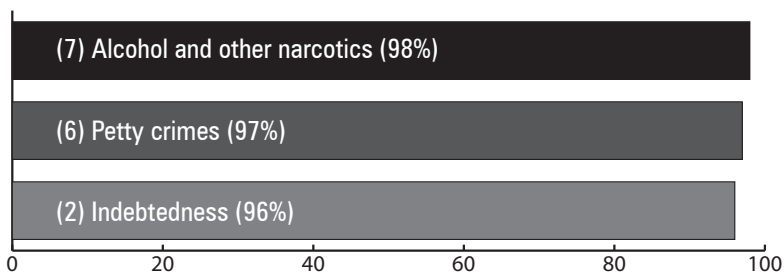
Figure 2: Social inclusion indicators (through religion)



(Evaluation of the intersection of all examined churches and religious groups; prepared according to the SIRONA 2010 research project.)

According to the research findings, the following indicators were the most successful: reduced addiction to alcohol and other narcotics, significant decline in petty crimes, and lower indebtedness of the Roma who became members of religious movements.

Figure 3: Most important indicators of social inclusion (through religion)



(Prepared according to the SIRONA 2010 research project.)

The less successful indicators (we speak about an 80 per cent success rate) were indicators related to the elimination of stereotypes and barriers on both sides (in this regard, the time factor appeared as most significant, i.e. such changes are most demanding in terms of time).

In addition to the fixed set of SII, we gave the respondents the possibility to characterise, in their own words, the social change which occurred as a result of religious change by means of an individual question in the questionnaire. Below is a summary of answers in the target group of religious converts who reflected upon their social change on the basis of such 'indicators':

SOCIAL INCLUSION INDICATORS IN THE COLUMN 'OTHER'

- 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)

(From SIRONA 2010 research project questionnaires.)

The most frequent answers included: improvement of marital relations, improvement of relations between children and parents, change in consumer behaviour, and change in family finance management.

4. BETWEEN INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION: SELECTED TOPICS

4.1 PASTORAL DISCOURSE AS A SOCIAL TOOL

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 of confirmation promises, the number of church marriages and confirmations in the Roma community largely increases. 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 studied localities affirmed that converted Roma make efforts not to run into debts (either against 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 only limited to pastoral activities (spiritual pastoral outreach) – the majority of them, in fact, acts 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 chose is given by the specific situation of 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.⁴³

In general, people living under permanent social threat choose other survival strategies than those who are not endangered or are endangered only for a short time. Moreover, people who have found themselves in social need have other priorities, other values and other life aims (they were marginalised in a socially excluded community, many of them lived and grew up facing an every-day social threat, without a concrete vision of change). Priests and pastors affirmed that the success of their mission in a socially excluded Roma community is directly dependent on the fact whether this very dimension of the target group is taken into account. Considering the 'poverty patterns'⁴⁴ transmitted from generation to generation, as well as the community patterns of the life in poverty' strategies,⁴⁵ pastors and priests are aware that a mission must have a long-term, intensive and highly personalised character.

4.2 PASTORAL DISCOURSE AS A TOOL FOR RELIGIOUS INCLUSION OR EXCLUSION

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', tying positive evaluations (true, real, correct, worth to follow, etc.) to the group 'us'/'our'. Such a discourse gives rise to the creation of closed religious groups à la 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, very hardly get closer to each other or make more frequent contacts. As

43 *Generational poverty* is defined as poverty of two consecutive generations. Yet, its features often start manifesting much 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).

44 It refers to patterns of social behaviour and reactions which directly or indirectly reproduce poverty from generation to generation.

45 It refers to community and individual patterns of strategies to 'survive' every-day life in permanent social exclusion or threat.

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 faced an opposite approach denoted as *inclusive pastoral discourse*. An inclusive pastoral discourse respects the multiplicity of 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 of 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 environments⁴⁶ with parallel pastoral works of various churches and religious groups within one Roma community.

⁴⁶ 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, change of members to other denominations, parallel visiting of several religious organisations, etc.).

The research also showed that the biggest potential of conflict arises when the following factors are cumulated:

BIGGEST POTENTIAL OF CONFLICT WITHIN ONE LOCALITY AT A TIME

Active Roma mission	Active Roma mission
- registered church	- non-registered church
- traditional rite	- non-traditional rite
- big church (in terms of membership)	↔ - small church (in terms of membership)
- strict exclusive pastoral discourse	- strict exclusive pastoral discourse
- exclusive support by local government	- without support by local government

(According to the SIRONA 2010 research project outcomes.)

A big potential of conflict is characteristic for those localities where a big church⁴⁷ with traditional rite and another non-registered small church⁴⁸ with non-traditional rite decide to simultaneously conduct active missions among the Roma. All these factors can (but in many cases need not) lead to further polarisation or even conflicts which, in extreme cases, result in the ending of a Roma mission.⁴⁹

In the framework of the research, we witnessed the exclusive pastoral discourse also in cases of small denominations which – within their rival fight – used it

47 The term *big churches* used in this study means churches which occupied the first five places as to membership according to the *Slovak Census results from 2001*. Churches called in this publication 'big churches' are often denoted in literature as 'traditional', 'dominant' or 'majority' Christian churches (for the purposes of our study, we use exclusively the term 'big' churches). According to membership data of the *Slovak Census results from 2001*, these churches include: Roman Catholic Church, Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession, Greek Catholic Church, Reformed Christian Church, and Orthodox Church.

48 In this study, the term *small churches and religious movements* means minor churches with less than 20,000 believers according to the statistic data of the *Slovak Census results from 2001*, occupying the 6th place and lower. The Religious Community Jehovah's Witnesses report the largest group of believers. For the purposes of this study, we decided to use the number of members as the only criterion on the basis of which we divided the churches and religious movements in Slovakia to 'small' and 'big'.

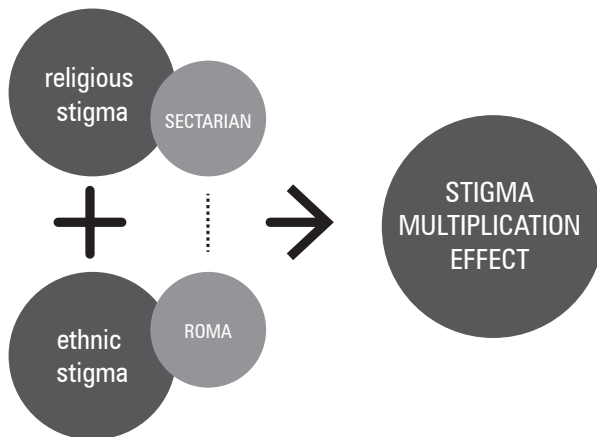
49 'The principal church has a completely negative attitude to it. With what they are saying. That they were taken by some sect, and who knows what they're gonna make with them, what they're gonna hammer in their heads, what programmes they will have, etc.' (SIRONA 2010 research project; external observer). Or an illustration of the situation in a locality in which the locally dominant church was passive in its work with the local Roma community, until a smaller, non-registered religious organisation entered the scene: 'They always call us sect here. Even if it works well. OK, let them call a sect, but why is nobody asking why it works that well?!' (SIRONA 2010 research project; religious leader of a non-registered religious group).

against each other, as well as cases of a charismatic daughter⁵⁰ denomination and its mother community. In this case, the split was not the result of organisational reasons (too big increase in membership), but rather because of the difference of opinions. Moreover, the new community had a more-or-less mono-ethnic (Roma) nature.

We saw an inclusive pastoral discourse in practice in the case of a locally dominant church from which a special Roma mission got separated and a civic association with religious activities was established. The local pastor of the Roma mission chose to adapt their liturgy according to the rival non-traditional rite.

Especially in a long-term perspective, some small non-registered religious groups which are locally often negatively labelled as 'sects' are aware that if an ethnic stigma resulting from affiliation to a Roma minority acquires a religious stigma arising from the label 'sectarian', the final effect can be the multiplication of stigmatisation and a deepening of social exclusion⁵¹ in spite of the fact that the life of Roma converts changes to a better. It is strategically disadvantageous for these religious groups to offer a socially inconvenient social status to its members. Therefore, they not only seek to legalise their status as a registered church, but try to make their pastoral discourse pro-inclusive.

Figure 4.: Multiplication of stigma



(Prepared on the basis of the SIRONA 2010 research project results.)

⁵⁰ Pentecostal and charismatic movements have not had a long tradition in Slovakia. Even though some movements started to be active yet in the 1920's, they saw a great boom not before 1990's with the arrival of social and religious freedom. For the general population, the nature of these movements is viewed as non-traditional, in many cases evoking the impression of being a 'religious sect'. In the case of some big traditional churches, we have observed some internal church currents of charismatic renewal, which also raise certain suspicions among the general population and are being accepted gradually.

⁵¹ For more details see Podolinská 2010a.

Even though the entrance of a religious organisation into a socially excluded Roma community may become a source of different kinds of polarisations,⁵² the research showed that such initial polarisations lead to a calming down of the situation and to a 'division of competences' or respect of each other's positions. The time factor is extremely important in this regard, as well as the effect of the positive social change and the willingness of stakeholders to overcome ethnic and confessional stereotypes. Under the influence of all these factors, a converted group of initially stigmatised Roma with the label 'sectarians' can become part of a relatively successful social inclusion. The personal attitudes of the local leaders of churches and religious groups and the attitudes of local self-governments are important factors, too.

4.3 EFFECTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE VS. SOCIAL INCLUSION

The research showed that with regard to the generation of a positive social change, it is the so-called 'non-traditional' missions that are highly effective; in the Slovak context, it is missions based on the Pentecostal and charismatic Christian currents (or currents operating in the framework of 'big' traditional churches). Their pastoral discourse comprises a lot of social elements and provides their own members with concrete guidelines regulating their everyday lives. They targetedly fight against external and internal indebtedness of their members, against alcoholism, gambling, drugs, thefts; they teach their members to manage 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. These movements bring a universality concept reaching beyond the ethnic and social context⁵³ 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 (up to ecstatic) manifestations.

From the point of view of intensity and a wider scope of positive social changes, 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. Principal emphasis is put on doctrinal issues ('spiritual growth') and related elimination of the 'defects' of Roma converts (emphasis on regular attendance of masses; making marriages official; first holy communion; confirmation promises; etc.). Work aimed at

52 For an illustration of the development of such a conflict and different kinds of polarisations related to the entry of a religious mission into a socially excluded Roma community see, for example, Podolinská, 2003a, b.

53 Trans-ethnic and trans-social discourse.

the acquisition of social skills and competences, 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 stability effect of the achieved social change 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 thanks to their conservative approach they largely contribute to the spreading and creation of stereotype opinions about the Roma, representing them as religiously passive, unstable and 'incorrigible'.

Locally dominant churches. When considering the nature of the religious scene in the Slovak 'recipient' society,⁵⁴ churches and denominations which are dominant in local communities or have a big number of members and are locally known or traditional have the biggest initial pro-inclusive impact. In this context, it is interesting that even if they use a religiously exclusive pastoral discourse,⁵⁵ since it is locally dominant churches which, in fact, represent the general population, the effect of an exclusive pastoral discourse is largely eliminated in this manner. A successful Roma mission of a locally dominant church therefore has an 'a priori' big potential of social inclusion. However, the project showed that the effect of generating a stable and wide-scope positive social change in converts is relatively low in this case.⁵⁶

The big initial pro-inclusive potential of locally dominant churches is not necessarily manifested in a concrete situation. The key factor in our particular case is that it is not only about socially excluded individuals/groups, but also about individuals/groups who are attributed the stigmatised – Roma ethnicity. This factor is so dominant that the local majority population acts as a 'closed group'⁵⁷ and does not wish to see a social or religious inclusion of the Roma population. The majority group then often 'forces' the locally dominant church to start a separate Roma mission (Roma masses, personal separation, etc.). This phenomenon then can be interpreted as a manifestation of a deepened social exclusion.⁵⁸

According to the results of our research, *local minority churches and religious groups* (usually with smaller membership, non-registered, non-traditional or unknown religious organisations) have a big potential to generate a stable and

54 Podolinská, 2010b.

55 'And they converted, accepted Jesus and reacted, but when they converted the priest immediately visited the mayor and said: these lands are not yours; if you continue going to that church, we'll take your lands, and where will you live then? Or another case that occurred: some of them visited me in spite of not going to our church; and when the priest saw a Roma, he told him: you go to that XY for sure - visit him and tell him to sign that you're not theirs!' (SIRONA 2010 research project; religious leader of a non-registered religious group).

56 It is based on the scope of data obtained by means of the SIRONA 2010 project.

57 See note on open and closed social networks in Part 4.4.1 of this study and note no. 63.

58 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.

wide-scope positive social change in their Roma converts. But the majority of them 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 enter the local scene even with a pro-exclusive potential in specific cases. Whether such potential is manifested, largely depends on the fact 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 the municipality citizens, 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 reevaluated (under the influence of a positive social change in 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.

4.4 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. To answer the questions why such a network is specific and what possibilities and opportunities it offers to its members – Roma converts, we shall use some general social theory concepts.

4.4.1. THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Primary and secondary networks. There are different types of social networks. Some of them confirm people in their positions, others rather offer them opportunities to obtain new positions. Socially excluded individuals usually have very limited possibilities to participate in a social network. Often, they find themselves outside of any functional social network. Yet, the participation of a socially excluded person in a social group is considered the first prerequisite of their successful social inclusion⁵⁹ by obtaining social habits and competences that can be relevant to their further social inclusion.⁶⁰ In addition, participation in a network can significantly compensate for a lack of resources.

59 '...networks are presented as highly efficient means to deal with (serious social and moral) problems as a guideline to multiply the strength of socially disadvantageous people by interconnecting individuals, or to renew the moral values of the whole society through new forms of social activity' (Keller 2009: 11); '(In an insecure society) the relevance of those sources... increases... which can be mobilised through variously patulous networks of informal ties and inter-personal contacts' (Keller, 2009: 17).

60 Payne, DeVol, Dreussi Smith, 2010.

In general, people dispose of two packages of social networks which they can enter and in which they can be active. The package of so-called *primary social networks*⁶¹ is a system of relations into which an individual is born – their family and wider kinsfolk. The second package of so-called *secondary networks*⁶² produces a society in which an individual lives – these are not based on blood bonds, but are built on a professional or interest basis.

Open and closed networks. Another interesting feature of social networks from the point of view of social theories is *openness* or *closeness*.⁶³ A network is considered open if the entry into the network is more-or-less free (little determined by factors set in advance). On the other hand, a network is closed when the entry into the network is strictly controlled and determined by hard-to-influence factors defined in advance (sex, age, property, origin, education, relatives, ethnicity, etc.). Social scientists have been dealing with the dilemma whether closed or rather open networks were more advantageous for people.⁶⁴ The prevailing opinion today is that closed networks are better for the protection and maintenance of acquired resources, and open networks are good for obtaining new resources.⁶⁵

Weak and strong ties. Some social theories divide social networks according to the type of prevailing ties. They differentiate between *weak* and *strong ties*,⁶⁶ where strong ties prevail in families and among people who have intensive blood or emotional bonds (they share common intensive experience); while weak ties can be formal and very superficial, and represent ties to more distant persons that we know little (casual, situational or professional acquaintances, etc.).^{67,68}

Socially strong ties (family ties or strong friendships) are extremely important for us at present,⁶⁹ and their importance is even bigger if we live socially endangered. Such ties represent a kind of ‘confidential personal insurance’ in critical situations because they do not allow an individual to hit the existential bottom.⁷⁰

61 For details on primary and secondary group see, for example, Novotná, 2010: 69.

62 Ibidem.

63 See, for example, Novotná, 2010: 43- 45.

64 The expedience of closed networks was emphasised by Pierre Bourdieu (strengthening the dominant position of the group) and James Coleman (strengthening norms and authority). On the other hand, the expedience of open networks was advocated by Mark Granovetter (playing the role of bridges towards outside, towards other groups) and by Ronald S. Burt.

65 Lin, 2006.

66 See, for example, Keller, 2009: 21, 27-28, 123, 159.

67 In the mid 1950 ‘s, Elizabeth Bott examined the character of marital roles in a sample of 20 London families depending on the density of networks maintained by the individual families. Bott formulated the opinion that weak ties are characteristic for families with higher education, while blue-collar workers usually (but not always) limit themselves to strong ties (Bott, 1971: 105, 112; quoted according to Keller, 2009: 21).

68 If this criterion is tied to primary and secondary networks, it is evident that strong ties prevail in primary networks, and weak ties are rather typical for secondary networks.

69 Some sociologists define the current society as insecure (for example, Keller, 2009).

70 Concept by Mark Granovetter.

According to some social scientists, weak social ties are equally important to us;⁷¹ thanks to them we can access better or different sources than through strong ties.⁷²

Moreover, through weak ties we try to get closer to people higher in the social hierarchy with whom we usually do not have strong blood or friend relations.⁷³

From this point of view, strong ties represent the key factor for the stabilisation of our social status, while the development of weak ties integrates us into a wider societal context, opens new opportunities and can compensate for our (initial) lack of resources. With regard to the social inclusion of excluded persons, weak ties can be seen as extremely important.

Within the present general population, the offer of a package with secondary networks is much bigger than that of a package with primary networks. But in general, what prevail in a socially excluded Roma community are primary social networks based on family background and blood bonds. Secondary social networks are limited to a minimum, or the Roma have a very limited access to them, since such networks are usually run in the framework of certain socially or ethnically defined groups. In many localities, secondary networks do not exist not even in the general, non-socially excluded population. In socially excluded Roma communities, we observe almost exclusively primary social networks (while witnessing a weakening tendency) with a non-functional offer of secondary social networks. It can be concluded that the Roma living in socially excluded communities have minimum opportunities to participate in functional social networks. Society is clearly failing to ensure and operate functional secondary networks in socially excluded Roma communities, and this problem is under-valuated as a whole.

A socially excluded Roma community works to a large extent as a 'closed group' or as a closed social network consisting of major 'closed groups'. A socially excluded individual living in a Roma community can thus rely almost exclusively on help provided within the group 'into which the individual is born' (family and wider family). The majority of functional ties have the character of 'strong ties', i.e. it is about blood or emotionally strong bonds providing support in critical life situations in particular.

The majority of functional social networks in socially excluded Roma communities have the character of **closed primary networks with prevailing strong ties**. Such social networks are an ideal space for acquiring an important feeling of personal security. In this space, however, an individual has minimum possibilities to obtain new resources, which significantly determines their social mobility and flexibility. From the point of view of social inclusion of socially excluded

71 '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).

72 Lin, 2006: 26.

73 Keller, 2009: 27.

individuals and groups, the support of **open secondary social networks with prevailing** (and present) **weak ties** is the key factor.

4.4.2. RELIGIOUS GROUP AS A HYBRID TYPE OF SOCIAL NETWORK

Currently, religious groups are often the only institutions in Slovakia which provide the inhabitants of Roma communities with an actual possibility of active engagement in a functional social network. They 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 lays 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 competences acquired by the Roma converts in the framework of these activities. With regard to the theoretical concepts, it is a kind of a *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 stabilising 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.

The 'openness' or 'closeness' of the discourse can oscillate depending on a concrete religious organisation or a concrete situation. *A religious group with an exclusive pastoral discourse and type of membership can actually be an extremely closed social network, while a religious group with an inclusive pastoral discourse and type of membership can be a completely open social network.*⁷⁴ In this case, too, the openness is conditioned by exclusive membership, and we could speak about a kind of *conditioned openness* or openness with a tint of exclusivity.

As the religious network newly defines the types of relations that work within it (family-type of relations, but outside of the primary/natural family), the scope of contacts and acquaintances of its members extends considerably. Often, the activities of religious groups do not only have a local character (limited to the locality

⁷⁴ A highly exclusive discourse can be the reason for the 'closing' of a religious network. If the imaginary dividing line member/non-member is identical with the dividing line Roma/non-Roma, then a religious group can contribute to an even bigger exclusion (segregation) of its members.

of the excluded community), but also a beyond-local or international framework. For many members of these religious communities it is a unique opportunity to establish weak social ties, i.e. new relations beyond the scope of their family and other members within the socially excluded community. The establishment of such 'bridging relations'⁷⁵ is considered to be one of the key factors of inclusion of socially excluded individuals/groups. For many Roma it is an opportunity not only to know their potential life partners, but also an opportunity to share useful information and obtain contacts and new possibilities in seeking a job, for example. With regard to the theoretical concept of weak and strong ties, we could conclude that, in general, religious networks are *dominated by weak types of ties, which can fulfil, under certain conditions, also functions typical to strong ties*.⁷⁶

In connection with our case 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. Hence, religious groups offer to their members 'insurance in crisis situation', 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.

4.5 RELIGIOUS GROUP AS A SOURCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

In general, the entry of a socially excluded individual to a social network considerably increases their possibilities for social capital accumulation. The higher (wider, more diverse) the social capital of the individual is, the higher the probability is that such individual is able to compensate for the lack of any of their input sources.⁷⁷ For a socially excluded individual, it is absolutely important to build and expand their social capital. 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.

4.5.1. THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

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

75 Robert Putnam speaks about a *bridging capital* (Putnam, 2000) that we build with the individuals of a group other than the group we come from.

76 The qualitative research implied, for example, that in case any member of the community finds themselves in financial need, the other members of the group would organise a financial collection to provide them with stability and a way out from the critical situation.

77 On the basis of the work of social workers, Ruby K. Payne, Philip DeVol and Terie Dreussi Smith found out 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).

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.⁷⁸ Social theorists differentiate between two types of social capital – *bonding* and *bridging* capital.

'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).

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.

As far as the building of social capital within religious groups working in socially excluded Roma settlements is concerned, it is extremely important whether their activities have an inclusive and beyond-local character, whether they reach out to both the Roma and non-Roma population, and whether their mission focuses on all social layers. It is highly effective to build the social capital of a socially excluded individual within a religious group in an inclusive way, if we approach this phenomenon from the point of view of categories of inevitable resources:⁷⁹ a religious community provides an individual with security in critical life situations, it can offer them suitable life examples, teach them the unwritten rules of another group, and improve their techniques to overcome hardship. In addition, a religious community is able to work with the individual's 'emotional' (teach suitable forms of communication) and 'mental' sources (teach reading and writing), in the lack of which that individual is extremely disadvantaged in their every-day life.

⁷⁸ In this chapter we work with the social capital concept of Pierre Bourdieu (1980).

⁷⁹ See previous note.

4.5.2. RELIGIOUS SOCIAL CAPITAL

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 increases extremely. Yet, the overall value of the social capital (or its bridging potential) is 'tested' outside of the religious group. It is therefore important how the religious group is perceived by the local non-members or external observers. 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 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 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 the 'bridging capital' is rather relative.

5. RELIGIOUS PATHS OF CHANGE

5.1 SOCIAL FACTORS OF A RELIGIOUS 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: 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 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 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.

Figure 5: Social factors of inclusion or exclusion

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 stable 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 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 respect the 'input' pro-inclusive and pro-exclusive potentials of the different churches and religious groups working among the Roma, we would find out that the subsequent 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 get 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 case, 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') led to an increased number of marriages within them and, in some cases, between non-Roma and Roma believers.⁸⁰ 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 in various ways, seek practical experience and guidelines to positively cope with critical situations produced on an every-day basis by a socially excluded community which is willing to learn the unwritten rules of the new group and improve their social skills and acquire new competences. From this point of view, the accumulation of a '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 inclu-

80 '(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 we met with 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, 2010b.

sion of its 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 1970's and 1980's and this church now includes members of a second or up to third generation of the first converts.⁸¹

On the other hand, the closed character of the group and an exclusive pastoral discourse⁸² 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 gets also 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 polarisation⁸³ and deepening of barriers (between the Roma and the non-Roma population) even though the converted Roma have experienced long-term social changes.

5.2 RELIGIOUS CHANGE AS A SPECIAL SOCIAL TOOL

The SIRONA 2010 research project showed that religious change can be an extremely effective social tool. It is a type of social change vectored from inside to outside. Compared to other social tools working with change from outside to inside, our religious change brings certain specific features which determine its social effect. These specific features make this change sometimes 'advantageous' and other times 'disadvantageous' compared to common social tools. We should not forget that a social change is not the primary objective of pastoral outreach. The following summary describes *some* specific features of a religious change with a social effect; they should be considered as ideas for reflection without any intention to give an evaluative opinion:

81 'It's a pity that you're only doing a research, because it would be good to publish what we're doing here, that our *Gypsies* should become an example for Slovakia as a whole. And it's because the majority of them are Jehovahists 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 get marry (sic), and their partners come to live here...' (SIRONA 2010, external observer). (In this case, we did not make the denomination anonymous).

82 '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).

83 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.

RELIGIOUS *push-up* factors of the social change effectiveness:

1. *A religious change is an exemplary case of a change from inside to inside.* Its prerequisites are relatively not demanding in terms of personnel, finances and time, thanks to which such change can be made extremely fast and effectively, and almost independently from external circumstances.
2. *Extraordinary authority of the mediator of religious/social change.* Priests, pastors and religious leaders have a great potential to become motivators of an internal change and external pro-activity. The charisma of a priest or a pastor appears to be one of the key factors of positive social changes in communities in which a religious mission has been conducted.
3. *Big authority and power of the sponsor of religious/social change.* In the eyes of believers, the sponsor of change is not a person (whatever important they can be – pastors or priests), but a sacral power – the God (Holy Spirit, Jesus). Believers who have gone through a religious change leading to a social change are convinced that the God sees everything, not only what they do, but also what they think, and therefore constantly seek to realise and prove their change in real life.
4. *Permanent mentoring.* In the eyes of believers, God works as a permanent (full-time) mentor. God can be with them whenever they need it. In weak moments and hard life situations which can occur anytime, they can immediately ask for internal consultation with the mentor who is not only empathic, but also omnipotent.
5. *Social pressure and control.* Social change is often the condition of membership (entrance and staying) in a religious group. In the case of some missions, social change (visible change of behaviour) is the sign of a 'spiritual' change. There is a tendency to assume that believers who do not show signs of gradual social change have not gone through a religious change. Thus, a social pressure is exercised on believers in communities, which has an important impact on the stabilisation of the social change. In some cases sanctions are imposed, including gradual exclusion of a member from their community. The stability of social change is also highly influenced by controlling an individual's social behaviour by the religious community.
6. *Possibility and availability of change.* The social change that believers witness in their communities proves the possibility of change. Since individuals cannot change the environment into which they were born and the possibilities to change their external life world are also limited, a personal change is perceived as a type of change that is available to all (in this case, it is in the hands of every believer). An actual change in real people from the community (members of family, neighbours, or friends) works as a proof for believers that a religious/social change is possible. ('If my neighbour has been able to change in a very short time, then I can also change, too, for sure!')

7. *'Snowball effect' of a positive change.* With an increase in the number of conversions or examples of positive change, the attractiveness of change to others in the community (non-members) increases, too. On the other hand, it works as evidence for members that they have made a correct decision on their path to change.
8. *Community as a stabiliser of social change.* In hard situations or if believers subjectively think that they cannot manage to make the desired change on their own, the group constantly gives them strength and confirms that the achievement of such change is possible.
9. *Faith as an inhibitor and stabiliser of social change.* Faith is an equally important factor to start up and maintain a social change, and plays a key role. Under circumstances where it is hardly possible to offer immediate 'external', i.e. material or social benefits, faith brings not only immediate 'internal' guidelines, but also internal benefits in the form of psychological satisfaction.

RELIGIOUS *push-down* factors of the social change effectiveness:

1. In general, a religious change ('change inside') is not interconnected with an actual possibility of a 'change outside' (systemic change of the external social environment). Converts can thus find themselves in a 'dual world': in the 'changed world' of their religious group and in the unchanged world of the external social or family constellations.
2. In the case of a religious change from inside to inside, pro-passivity changes to pro-activity. In general, it is an internal activity within a religious group. Hence, it is usually a religious activity that can be evaluated by an external observer in different ways.
3. Where no actual possibility of hierarchical participation exists within a group or where it exists only for a certain number of individuals, or is gender-restricted, after a certain period of time we can observe in converts the burn-out syndrome or loss of belief in the possibility of realising their religious change.
4. If a religious change does not bring along the possibility of non-religious realisation of an individual leading to a change in their social status, a convert can resign to their social role and active participation (which can cause their social or religious passivity).
5. Membership in a 'closed' religious group with a highly exclusive discourse can lead to a deepening of social polarisations.
6. If the religious border in a given locality copies the ethnic line, the exclusion of the religious group members (Roma) can be enhanced in spite of a positive social change. The religious character of the social change can become counterproductive.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 KEY FINDINGS

With regard to the effect of social change and potential of the social inclusion or exclusion of religious groups working among the Roma in Slovakia, the SIRONA 2010 research project came to the following conclusions:

- A religious change has a high potential of social change. The set of 14 social inclusion indicators showed a minimum of 80% success rate of subjective perception of social change (changes in the social habits, competences and skills of the Roma who have gone through a considerable religious change);
- A positively perceived social change has a high potential of social inclusion into the general population (under the condition of relatively low initial financial and personnel inputs);
- The key moment of social change is social participation in a social network/group;
- Participation in a social network increases the possibilities of a socially excluded individual/group to compensate for the original lack of resources;
- Religious groups come to socially excluded communities with a specific offer of social networks which enable the Roma to participate in their structures. Besides an increased feeling of personal security (on a religious basis) their social skills and competences increase, too, and do not end with their possible leaving the religious group;
- With the entrance of the Roma into local religious groups, the nature of their social networks and the quality of their social capital changes, too. Both these factors are extremely important especially in the lack of economic capital (financial resources, possibility to get a job, etc.) that we commonly observe in socially excluded Roma communities;
- The highest potential of social inclusion pertains to such religious or social change which is perceived as positive by the majority (recipient) population/group;
- Many religious groups offer social networks in which the Roma can dynamically develop their '*romipen*' (religious songs in Roma language; Roma as a pastoral language; training of Roma leaders, etc.). In this case, social inclusion is conducted rather at the level of establishing social links between previously isolated Roma communities;
- The SIRONA 2010 research project also demonstrated that, with regard to

the stability of social change in converts, it is optimal if such change is made at the community/group level;

- The following factors have the biggest impact on the final effect of inclusion or exclusion: 1. Type of religious group (with 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 a religious group (open or closed, with prevailing strong or weak ties); and 5. Type of social capital that religious group members can gain (bonding or bridging);
- A positive social change in socially excluded Roma does not automatically lead to their social inclusion into the general (recipient) population. The research confirmed that social inclusion occurs after the recipient society is willing to accept the social change and 'open' itself to the excluded group of Roma;
- A religious change can bring along a deepening of social exclusion if the religious group uses an exclusive pastoral discourse in its pastoral work. This can deepen social polarisations and raise obstacles between the Roma and non-Roma inhabitants of municipalities, or between believers and non-believers;
- Pastoral outreach is a church instrument primarily designed to achieve a religious change. Social change is a 'side product' in this case. Pastoral outreach is not a systemic instrument to achieve social change and cannot fully substitute state social policies;
- As far as the social effectiveness of social change is concerned, it is suitable to perceive it as a supplementary social tool. Considering all its specific features, the most effective elements of this tool (as a complex approach and work with all age groups at the community level) can be also used to design effective professional and systemic state social instruments.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS⁸⁴ TO CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

On the basis of analyses of several localities with successful religious missions with different denominations, we elaborated in the framework of the project a model of a so-called 'complex outreach package' which has the highest potential for the social inclusion of the Roma. This model proved to be the most successful model of pastoral outreach by several pastors among the Roma.

⁸⁴ For the purposes of this study, we limited ourselves to provide only a few principal recommendations. For the total list of recommendations, see Podolinská, Hrustič, 2010: 116-118.

- First of all, it is important that the pastoral discourse is as complex as possible and focused on all age groups. Yet, it appears to be very effective to work with the different age and gender groups individually, under various discussion groups or in other forms;
- It is important to allow participation in the religious group structure to the highest number of Roma members possible. Emphasis on the education of Roma leaders and insisting on active participation within the group structure have proven to be good tools;
- A religious group should carry out activities of a local nature and, at the same time, it should seek creating activities beyond that locality providing an opportunity for the members to establish contacts with members from other localities, either other Roma or members of the general population;
- Several cases showed that it is highly ineffective to provide gifts to group members and build a mission on giving presents; it works the other way round: many religious missions that request from their members at least a symbolic financial contribution are much more effective and their membership is much more stable. According to pastors, one of the key reasons is that members of the group then consider that group as their own and participate in its joint formation with more enthusiasm.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATE ADMINISTRATION

- The state administration and policy makers should see pastoral work among the Roma as one of several effective social tools. We are of the opinion that it would be suitable to create systemic and transparent models to promote an effective implementation of this instrument in practice;
- The state should motivate self-governments and churches to abandon the exclusive model in practice, since it is counterproductive from the point of view of the involved localities;
- The state should also promote awareness-raising and dissemination of information about positive examples of social change;
- It is apparent that several churches have achieved relatively good results on the social inclusion of Roma. However, these non-registered religious groups have the stigmatising status of 'sects' in the SR. One of the possibilities would be to review the counterproductive criteria concerning the registration of churches in Slovakia.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

- Self-governments should implement an inclusive model of cooperation with registered and non-registered religious groups in practice;

- Self-governments should not avoid promoting local pastoral initiatives among the Roma (financial and moral) by, for example, renting municipal premises for assembly purposes, etc.;
- Municipalities should seek to promote awareness-raising and disseminate information among the general population;
- Municipalities should detect potential conflicts and try to be mediators in their elimination;

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS TO NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

- Since localities with a considerable scope of pastoral outreach are characterised by enhanced communication and social skills, consumer behaviour and habits are changing, and there are community leaders exercising local authority, we believe that this environment is extremely favourable for the implementation of subsequent social and other support programmes. Therefore, we recommend these localities to become target groups for different types of NGO projects that are currently implemented or will be implemented in Slovakia.

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