

THE SENSE OF UNIQUENESS OF THE KALISZ MIDDLE CLASS: A Sociological Essay

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Kalisz is a medium-sized city of about 100 000 inhabitants located in central Poland. In the nineteenth century and at the beginning of twentieth century, it was inhabited by the rich bourgeoisie, Polish, but also Jewish and German. Both World Wars completely destroyed the city, which was settled in 1945 with new inhabitants, mainly from the surrounding villages. From 1975 to 1998 Kalisz was a capital city of one of the Polish voivodships. After the reform of the Polish administration its situation changed dramatically, and the outflow of funds resulted in stagnation and slow destruction. The main workplaces in factories and the administration were abolished, and people started to migrate to bigger Polish cities or abroad. Today, the city is mostly known for its piano factory 'Calisia',¹ its philharmonic orchestra, and its music festivals, especially the Piano Jazz Festival.

This is all I knew about Kalisz before I joined the research study the "'Kracauer Project': Relational Ethnography in two Post-Communist Towns', whose two pillars are reflection about contemporary society and sociological writing.² The other post-communist town is Erfurt; it is located in the territory of the former GDR and counts Kalisz as one of its twin or sister cities.³ The present article is part of the project and a result of my research stay in the city. The 'Kracauer Project' has two characteristics. The first is that we interview and observe a group of dwellers in both cities over a relatively long time period, choosing as project participants people around forty years old with school-age children. This is why, looking for my research group, I initiated my research in a primary music school where I had the chance to meet pupils and their parents.⁴ The other characteristic of the project is that it is inspired by the writings of German journalists from 1920s, mainly Siegfried Kracauer and his book *Salaried Masses. Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany* (Kracauer 1998; Thériault 2017). In presenting our research we combine scientific writing with reportage and literature (Thériault and Kurpiel

¹ The factory was founded in 1878 and closed in 2007 but is still considered one of the symbols of the city.

² Barbara Thériault, Université de Montréal, initiated the project in the German city of Erfurt. The project is funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC-CRHS).

³ My lack of knowledge was also caused by a lack of (scientific) literature on Kalisz (Przygodzki 2012; Walczak and Andrysiak 2006).

⁴ The more specific reasons were that music schools are generally smaller than ordinary primary schools, and classes are held in the afternoon, so it was easier for me to present myself. While choosing the field of my research I also took into consideration the musical association of the city.

2017). For this reason, the following article also has the character of a sociological essay rather than that of a standard academic paper.

The main hypothesis underlying the 'Kracauer Project' is that, almost thirty years after the radical political change (the fall of communism in Poland and the GDR), we could observe a social process of 'bourgeoisification' (*Verbürgerlichung*) expressed in a desire to be part of a 'good society' (Thériault 2014).⁵ The process is visible through the web of institutions that structure the routine of everyday life (i.e. workplaces, schools, holidays, music classes, invitations and celebrations, and social life). While Barbara Thériault was observing such an attitude among parents of a group of children in Erfurt, I wanted to see if a similar process of *Verbürgerlichung* was visible in Kalisz and, if so, how it manifested itself.

My first goal was to find a group of city dwellers, to enter their world, and to observe their everyday life (Sztompka 2008, 24). I asked questions, at the beginning very general, including what is important for them and what their everyday life practices are, including the crucial elements of their life and its routine (de Certeau et al. 2011); how they interpret them; and how they change over time. Of importance for my research interest is the 'average' size of Kalisz as well as the fact that the city is situated in Central Europe.

My first observation was that the people I talked to were proud of their city and its past. They privilege elements from the past (the architecture, multinational society of nineteenth-century Kalisz, and elegant behaviour) as well as traditionally 'bourgeois' music, education, and tradition. Elements in line with this attitude emerged, including music classes and a private Catholic school. However, something that surprised me was their approach to religion and its institutions. For instance, almost half of the project participants had not married in a church, a diversion from tradition which is still not very common in Poland, especially in smaller cities. This observation triggered more questions about the complex relation between religion and the Church institution and about the role of the Catholic school among other everyday life institutions.

METHODOLOGY

As an ethnologist and cultural anthropologist, I use qualitative methods in my studies: observation, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 2000). In Kalisz, the first questions I asked were intended to get to know the participants of the project as well as to present myself as an anthropologist. Very soon, I left the formula of the semi-structured interview and switched to an unstructured one combined with observation and elements of shadowing. My aim was to meet with my project participants on several occasions and in various places: at school, the workplace, restaurants, coffeehouses, their homes, and the city park. The intensification of contact with the individuals was more important for me than the number of participants.⁶ Social relations in Kalisz, as a relatively small town, are based on gossip and conventions—which often came up in the interviews I

⁵ In this case 'bourgeoisification' is a social process, not a structural one (Panini 2015, Dimou 2014).

⁶ I was in Kalisz the first time from 9-29 March 2015 and then again in November 2015 and September 2016. During that time, I conducted interviews and participant observation with the city dwellers. Most of the interviews I quote in this text are from the first research period. I met 12 participants, all of whom were parents of school-aged children. In addition, I also conducted several interviews with teachers, nuns, heads of schools, and grandfathers and grandmothers of children and their friends. I intend to continue my research in Kalisz in the coming years.

conducted. People 'know each other' and their webs of relations are well developed as the majority of Kalisz's inhabitants were born in the city, and some of them have never left.

Finding people around forty years old with at least one child was not an easy task: indeed, they are often busy people, more so than students or elderly people. They have their own jobs and have to take care of children as well as their social life. I wanted to enter a small community of people somehow linked together to start my research in an unknown city. Thinking of the 'music-related' connotation of Kalisz as well as of a place where I would meet school-aged children, I directed my first steps to the Kaliszian music school.

The structure of this essay reflects the process of my research in Kalisz. In each part, I introduce places (two schools) and people I met in Kalisz (Marek, Jacek, Kasia, and Tomek). These are my 'guides' for different research problems and their analyses.

THE MUSIC SCHOOL

The music school trains both primary and secondary school children and is located in an old building in the city centre, close to the big city park. Classes are held in the afternoons. When I first visited the school, many parents were waiting for their children in a large entrance hall or smoking cigarettes on a bench outside the school. The parents knew each other by sight or by ritual conventional small talk or gossip (Thériault 2015; de Certeau et al. 2011). Having obtained permission from the head of the school to do observations and conduct interviews in the music school, I started speaking with the parents as well as with some of the teachers.

My first question was about the motivations underlying the choice of music school. According to the head of the school, parents' motivations have changed over the last decades: 'Today, music [school] is taken as an additional activity not as—as few years ago—a first step toward a professional musical career'. I have heard similar answers from parents. Many of them listed as a first factor their children's 'intellectual development', which is in line with current popular theories according to which playing a musical instrument helps to develop both hemispheres of the brain. None of the parents wanted their child to be a professional musician primarily due to the fact that, as they stressed, it is a very low-paid and 'unstable' profession in Poland.

Marek

The first parent I got to know well was Marek—an engineer, father of nine-year-old Wiktoria. We spent several hours speaking while Wiktoria was taking her classes. When I asked Marek what was important about Wiktoria going to the music school, he highlighted certain behaviours deemed elegant and traditional, such as girls wearing smart dresses:

Wiktoria has developed intellectually, she has a good memory and the ability to behave in an appropriate form at the right place (...). While at public events, concerts, she knows that you have to wear nice shoes, a dress. We teach her this at home, she always has to come to school dressed neatly (...) but it's such an additional point to be able to express and show yourself.

Other parents who I have met in the school speak similarly about children's behaviours. According to Julia's father, a city councillor: 'Playing an instrument elevates and ennobles a person'. Some of the parents admitted that the music school gives their children 'a feeling of uniqueness' or 'a feeling of being better than their peers' in knowing how to play a musical

instrument. One of the teachers, Maria, remarked: ‘it is good to say “my child attends music school”’.

From all the factors enumerated, two emerged as most remarkable: one, verbalized directly, was care in regard to the children’s mental development and the other being a more intuitive sense of uniqueness through elegant behaviour. This recalls Pierre Bourdieu’s findings for France and his concept of distinction and capitals (Bourdieu 1984). However, one thing is different and interesting in Kalisz: my participants’ aspirations—and what could be associated with a search for distinction—were past-oriented. Almost thirty years after fall of communism, Kalisz city dwellers are looking at the pre-World War I period, to the ‘golden era’ of Kalisz history as well as the interwar period of the so-called ‘Free Poland’. When I asked the city dwellers to tell me something about their city, their narration started in the nineteenth century and finished before World War II. It included the period of a great development of the city (the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) but also a period that is thought to be fundamental in the process of shaping the local identity—the Russian partition (1815-1918).⁷ Their image of the city in the beginning of the twentieth century is idealized and strengthened by the city’s marketing (with the slogan ‘Kalisz—the oldest city in Poland’). However, the participants not only stressed historical monuments and the social structure of Kalisz at the beginning of twentieth century (multinational and multi-classed) but also a special ‘bourgeois’ lifestyle one feels in Marek’s reference to elegant behaviour. Interestingly, none of my interlocutors from Kalisz mentioned the time of the communist regime in Poland (1945-1989), as if this period did not exist in the city’s history.

THE OTHER SCHOOL, NAZARETH

Walking into the music school entrance hall, where I spent a few hours every day, I saw a poster about ‘Nazareth’—a private Catholic kindergarten, primary school, and gymnasium. Discovering that a lot of children from the music school were also attending ‘Nazareth’, I then started to look for families with children both in the music school and the Catholic school or kindergarten to meet with them.

Nazareth is one of over 500 Catholic—some private, some public—schools in Poland.⁸ It is run by the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth (other ‘schools of Nazareth’ are located in Warsaw, Cracow, Częstochowa, and Bzianka). The Catholic background is emphasized in the school rules of admission that are available on the school’s webpage:

*The school accepts seven- and six-year-old children who (...) are open to Christian values and whose parents consciously choose a Catholic education.*⁹

One of the documents required for enrolment in the school is a reference letter from a parish priest. When enrolling a child in Nazareth parents are required to sign the following declaration:

We fully accept the concept of the school’s training principles and Christian education practised in the Primary School of the Sisters of Nazareth in Kalisz. We are also aware that, in accordance with

⁷ According to my interviewees, the ‘local character’ of the city was shaped during the ‘Russian era’ and is now seen as typical for its inhabitants today. It includes, they stress, sentimentalism, a lack of order, and an inability to organize oneself but also strong ties to one’s circle of family and friends.

⁸ According to the Central Statistical Office in 2011 there were 540 Catholic schools in Poland—data from the ‘Report about Catholic Church in Poland 1991-2011’, <http://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/kosciol-katolicki-w-polsce-1991-2011,12,1.html>, p. 232.

⁹ Rules of recruitment: <http://serwer1569332.home.pl/projekt/oferta-edukacyjna/rekrutacja-20152016/>.

the nature of the school, pupils are required to participate in the activities of religious education organized by the institution.

We agree to the participation of our child in the religious instruction classes organized by the school and the sexual education classes based on Christian ethics.

It is also well known in Kalisz that every lesson in Nazareth starts with prayer as part of the school's tradition, that there is a little chapel for the school's masses, and that the children are required to take an active part in the Catholic church life: attending Sunday masses, taking confession organized by the school once a month, and celebrating religious and national feasts and events—preferably together with the teacher and peers from the school.

Nazareth—a way to be a part of 'a chosen' group

Poland is one of the most religious countries in Europe. Depending on the data available, 88 to 95% of the population belong to a religious denomination, from which around 96% of respondents identify with the Roman Catholic Church (Pędziwiatr 2015, 164; European Values Study 2008). Even though these numbers are now slightly lower than in 1989 (data from 2013: Pędziwiatr 2015, 165), institutional religious practices (Sunday mass, church marriages, baptisms) remain high in Poland (Marianski 2004, 244). Religiosity levels are higher in villages and small towns as well as in the eastern part of Poland than in large cities and the western part of the country, where the secularization process is more noticeable (Pędziwiatr 2015, 165).¹⁰

Primarily due to the political change, the number of Catholic schools in Poland increased from 24 in 1989 to over 500 in 2011. The Catholic schools are reputed for having high educational standard—in some of them classes are conducted in foreign languages or students have the possibility to take international final examinations.¹¹ The educational profile of Polish Catholic schools underscores, next to the religion, values such as tradition and patriotism, which is in tune with the image of Polish religiosity, strongly linked with nationalism (Zubrzycki 2006; Pędziwiatr 2015). Most of the schools are not mixed, being either all-girls or all-boys boarding high schools. Moreover, they are primarily chosen by families whose members identify as very religious or traditional.

'Nazareth' is not only the sole religious school in Kalisz. For many years, it was the only private school in the city. Although a second private primary school—'Jagiellończyk'—was opened in 2014, it is not perceived as a real alternative to Nazareth. The former has, among the people I spoke with while in Kalisz, a reputation for being a 'special school'. It is consistently upheld by a set of rules such as the pre-selection of children, high tuition fees, and an emphasis on achieving very good results at final examinations. Those elements are seen by the project participants as positive values because they are associated with an investment in one's child's future. They may also give parents and children a sense of uniqueness as well as of being a part of 'good society'.

The material expression of the boundary between the 'children from Nazareth' and the 'others' is a wall surrounding the school and a wall separating the children from the private

¹⁰ This could be explained by the fact that in Poland the religion and religious practice were present during the time of the communist regime, even though not in the public sphere. During this time religion and the Catholic Church were connected with the anti-communist movement. The political change of 1989 and the new appearance of the Polish Catholic Church as a second economic and political power in Poland resulted in a decrease in religiosity—unlike in some other post-communist countries or former republics of the Soviet Union, such as Romania or Armenia (Grigore 2015; Froese 2004).

¹¹ For instance, in one of the 'Nazareth schools' in Warsaw where the high-school students have the opportunity to follow the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program and pass the international exam—this is of course one of the most important point in the school's PR.

Catholic kindergarten from the children going to a socio-therapeutic community centre run by the sisters free of charge within the charitable activities of the church. The nun I interviewed explained me that the parents are happy to see the wall because for them it is proof that their children are safe—that is, physically and mentally protected from the outside world.

This kind of ‘wall-orientated’ attitude is nowadays common among the Polish middle class. Poland is one of the countries where gated-communities are the most popular (Gądecki 2009). However, fenced houses are seen by the participants of the project in Kalisz as something negative. They are associated with social isolation (negative value) that, according to their words, had previously characterized the highest classes of the society and that in contemporary Poland is identified with the so-called *nouveaux riche* (*nowobogaccy*).¹²

A visual sign of children from ‘Nazareth’ is a dark blue school uniform with a ‘cross of Nazareth’, called *nazaretka*. It is used in all Nazareth schools across Poland. Only when I learned this did I realize that the music school was full of children in dark-blue sweatshirts. It was a very useful sign to me because even though I was trying to enter the ‘Nazareth’ world, the nuns were very cautious and did not allow me to talk to the pupils or their parents. They appointed one of themselves to answer all my questions and to show me the school and the kindergarten space behind the wall. When I continued going to the music school, I kept my eyes open for ‘crosses of Nazareth’ on the pupils’ uniforms.

Jacek

A parent with a child in both the music school and ‘Nazareth’ with whom I was spending a lot of time was Jacek. He was a forty-three-year-old man when we met, worked part-time jobs, and was born in Kalisz. He was interested in history, voted for the right-wing ‘Right and Justice’ party, was a traditionalist, and liked to call himself a ‘crazy about the past outsider’ (*zwariowany na punkcie historii outsider*)—even though he has a well-developed network of friends and relatives. He was more than happy to speak about his well-situated grandfather from a good Kalisz family who ‘has taught him about the real Polish history’ in the time of communism. Explaining why he enrolled his son, Mieszko, in the music school and in Nazareth, he said:

Well, since so—before the war in such good middle-class families—it was like good taste to make the child play a musical instrument, usually it was a piano, so I also enrolled Mieszko for piano (...) Music gives him good manners.

Jacek emphasized on many occasions that the most important thing in life is living according to one’s principles and raising a child—*Kinderstube* (the traditional upbringing of a child focusing on learning good manners)—‘like it used to be in the past’. In his worldview (which is partly unconscious, partly a consciously-built self-image) religion, patriotism, and tradition are inextricably linked together.¹³ Those are also values that—according to Jacek—are missing in today’s world. He explained that he named his children (a son and a daughter) after the first Polish prince who brought Christianity to Poland—Mieszko I and his wife Dobrawa. Jacek wanted his children to renew Poland with good values, just like Mieszko and Dobrawa starting

¹² Whereas the participants of the project associated themselves with the middle class (empirical material collected in September 2016).

¹³ What is not surprising due to the fact that in Poland religion and national identity are closely connected is that religion is thought to be one of the most important factors of ‘Polishness’. It is connected with the independence movement of the nineteenth century when Poland was occupied by Austro-Hungary, Prussia, and Russia as well as the anti-communist struggle from 1945-1989. In Poland we can, however, observe both processes: a politicization of religion and a sacralization (deification) of the nation (Zenderowski 2011; Zubrzycki 2006; Borowik 2010, 2012). The religion, traditionalism, and anti-communism are ideological factors that are correlated with voting for the right—for example, the Polish Right and Justice party (Swindal 2011).

the new history of Poland as a Christian country. He would like his children to embrace his views: an interest in Polish history and a negation of the contemporary world. Jacek tries not to use computers; he claims that he is too 'old-fashioned' for it.

What surprised me was that Jacek and his wife had not married in a church, only at the registrar's office. They legalized their relation after their first child had already been born because they needed to take out a common loan for building a house. This fact did not fit with the image of Jacek and his patriotic and religious-oriented attitude. What is more, not having married in the church is in general quite rare and not necessarily considered 'acceptable' in Poland, especially in smaller towns and villages. Even though the number of Catholic weddings in Poland has decreased (from over 200 000 in 1990 to about 170 000 in 2011¹⁴), the number is still very high, and they are more popular than civil weddings.

RELIGION, INSTITUTIONS, AND INVESTMENT

After learning such an exceptional fact, I added a question regarding marriage to my unstructured questionnaire. It turned out that about half of the project participants had not married in a church, and they could list more parents with children in 'Nazareth' who had not married in the church, either. Most of them were not asked about this as part of their children's recruitment process. In asking about religious practice I have also learned that some of the parents I spoke to (for example Antonina's mother) are practising Catholics. But, on the other hand, there was a group of families who rarely go to church and do not attach importance to religious practice.

The reasons for enrolling children in Nazareth listed by the parents start with it being a 'good school, with good results on final exams' — which is associated with the care for one's children's education. Another group of factors is connected with the children's safety: 'small classes, nice atmosphere'. A third is connected to religion. The parents often list these three reasons together. As Antonina's mother said: 'we live with the principles; we raise [our child] in the Christian faith', and then she added: 'you need to invest in education'.

Although not always explicitly stated, religion was present in one of two ways in the parents' narrations about Nazareth: they enrolled their children in Nazareth **because of** or **despite** religion. What I found interesting was that, in both cases, religion is presented as an important value. Very often, it is defined together with tradition (also in the anti-communist context¹⁵) and certain principles. It is described as 'something important and desirable' for the children's education and one's life.

According to a religion teacher from one of the Kalisz high schools, most of the parents from Nazareth are not religious. She said: 'Maybe they don't think that praying before classes, taking part in school masses, and other religious practices in Nazareth are what their children need, but at least "it won't harm them"'. The teacher admitted that many of her students, after

¹⁴ Report about Catholic Church in Poland 1991-2011, <http://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/kosciol-katolicki-w-polsce-1991-2011,12,1.html>, p. 162.

¹⁵ Although in socialist Poland religion was not suppressed and religiosity remained high, nowadays in Poland religion is strictly associated with an anti-communistic movement as well as with everything that is opposite to socialism. Socialism is understood here not only as a political system but also as a specific imposed lifestyle, and a time of shortage, censorship, and limited freedom and ability. During socialism churches were places where one could cultivate the values from before the Second World War that were neglected during communism (such as Polish patriotism, nobility, and intelligentsia). Saturday masses were small weekly celebrations (after which many Poles would go for dinner with family, such as grandparents), an opportunity to dress-up nicely in a time of shortage and unification.

finishing Nazareth, resigned—with their parents' permission—from going to religion classes in high school.

Kasia and Tomek

One of the couples I met in Kalisz was Kasia and Tomek. I visited them in their newly built home in the city suburbs, close to a small forest. Because they both work a lot, we met in the evening. They have a six-year-old daughter, Maja. Although her husband and her do not go to the church and had a civil wedding when Maja was born, Kasia was thinking at the time about enrolling her in Nazareth. Most of her friends have their children there, and she had heard only good opinions about the school from them. After two hours of conversation, Kasia said that, in fact, even though it is not very visible, she is religious inside her heart. 'God is important to me. I overcame many difficulties thanks to my faith'. She then added: 'Maja is a lively, difficult child. Only the sisters of Nazareth can make a nice girl out of her'. The good manners and elegant behaviour are to be learned at both the music and the Catholic school, especially by the little girls. The mothers I spoke to in Kalisz wanted their daughters to 'be nice girls', which is in accordance with traditional social roles even though they themselves are often independent women, working in various professions, from teachers to engineers and architects.

Apparently, there is always a good reason to enrol a child in Nazareth (because of or despite religion) although it adds more to the busy schedule of their daily routine.

CONCLUSION: BEING BOTH UNIQUE AND THE SAME

The group of parents with children in the music school and at 'Nazareth' is very heterogeneous. Among them there are, for example a counsellor, an English teacher, an interior designer, and an ambulance driver. But besides the differences, the whole group has some things in common: the parents I have met in Kalisz come from the same generation. They are now around forty years old, part of their youth was spent in the communist period, and their professional careers started after 1989. This is also the first post-war Polish generation to have—with capitalism and its multiplication of products and life-choices—a chance to choose a different lifestyle than that of their parents. Finally, this generation constitutes the basis for theories about the new Polish middle class, which has become recently, almost thirty years after the fall of communism, a common subject for Polish sociologists and journalists (Leszczyński 2010; Domański 2013, 2105; Matys 2015; Bielik-Robson 2014; Leder 2013).¹⁶

Some observations made by Polish sociologists and philosophers are similar to my reflections based on Kalisz—for instance, special ambitions and aspirations to have a 'good life', especially for their children's future. As Polish sociologist Henryk Domański remarked: 'People from the new Polish middle class tend to live better, to show it to their neighbours and friends. Therefore, they send their children to the best schools, they put aside the current pleasures for future gains. Consumption, which is a proof of success, is tempered by a long-term strategy—a main characteristic of the middle class is thinking about the future' (Domański 2013, 1). The 'good life' as well as 'future happiness' is a target to be achieved (Annas 2008, 965).

The attitude that characterizes my participants is that of not elevating oneself too much: they are opposed to the concept of the *nouveaux riche* and highlight their middle position in society. There is, however, a noticeable exception: children should elevate themselves. It is through

¹⁶ Middle class or middle classes, defined through their lifestyle, culture or the social, political, and economic space they occupy, are of course a common subject of research outside of Poland (see among others: Panini 2015; Zang, 2011; Heiman, Freeman, Liechty, 2012).

the children that the parents attain a higher status. This could perhaps explain the ambivalent attitude toward 'walls' and 'gated communities' described above. Fenced houses are viewed as symbols of the social isolation of the nouveaux riche and are thought of negatively, while the wall surrounding the Nazareth school is interpreted as a positive value because it is there for the children's 'safety'.

The parents' concern for the future of their children is also reflected in many different additional activities after school—besides Nazareth and the music school, children attend foreign language classes, sport, or ballet. This (kind of lifestyle) is very time-consuming and requires very good skills in the organization of time, especially in connection with a tendency to move outside the city to the newly built area with individual houses.

Jacek, Kasia, Tomek, Marek and the rest of the parents with children in the music school and Nazareth I talked to while in Kalisz are led by two different ambitions: a need for being unique (by an elegant way of behaving, playing a musical instrument, or investing in their children's education) and a will to be part of a special group. It could be an imaginary group of 'traditional middle-class families'—like in the case of Jacek, or a group of well-situated friends—like in the example of Kasia and Tomek. This sense of uniqueness is also achieved by being a part of a special network of social relations and institutions, which are part of their everyday life routines. For the parents I met in Kalisz these involve driving their children from one school to another or, together with other parents, participating in different events organized by the schools before they—late in the evening—return to their new homes in the suburbs.

This is why, for analysing the attitudes of the project participants, rather than turning to Pierre Bourdieu I prefer to refer to Georg Simmel in his essay on fashion (Simmel 1957), where he describes such a dialogical relationship between 'being the same' and 'being unique'. Fashion gives individuals an opportunity to imitate others (without taking responsibility for it) but also to fulfil the need to show one's individuality and sense of uniqueness. Reading Simmel's essay, I could not help but feel that I could replace the word 'fashion' with 'the music school' or 'the Catholic school'. This could also cast some light onto the complex relation between religion, religious practice, and religious institutions, such as Catholic schools, which, similar to the music school, contribute to building a sense of uniqueness—at least in present-day Kalisz.

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