

## The relationship between the level of social capital and the effectiveness of local governments in western Slovakia

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### Abstract

In this article we explored the relationship between the level of social capital and the effectiveness of local governments. This relationship should be positive, since the theory (Putnam – Leonardi – Nanetti 1993) suggests that high levels of social capital cause greater effectiveness of state in given area. Despite this, we have found negative correlation between the variables, contrary to our hypothesis. That is unexpected, yet interesting outcome. The cause for this may be intervening factors in this relationship, most notably the different size of researched municipalities and very recent municipal elections. To rule out methodological causes, we intend to repeat the research with new data using more cases and more kinds of data to measure both variables.

**Keywords:** effectiveness, local government, social capital, Western Slovakia

### 1. Introduction

In our previous research we have constructed a model for measuring social capital and used it on the NUTS 2 region Western Slovakia, which consists of Trenčín, Trnava and Nitra Self-Governing Regions (Bušša 2017). We found some differences in the levels of social capital in Western Slovakia. The lowest values clearly concentrated in Upper Nitra natural region, while the highest values were measured in proximity to the largest cities. This was an expected outcome, since the Upper Nitra region was showing some signs of weakened civic society and was a place of numerous historical changes which were likely among the causes of the low social capital today. That being said, Upper Nitra was not the only part of Western Slovakia with lower measured values. The eastern part of Nitra Self-Governing Region, or the northernmost parts of Trenčín Self-Governing Region were also among the areas with lower levels. The largest cities and their surroundings were expected to be the places with the highest social capital, as were, to a lesser extend the central parts of Hungarian population in Slovakia.

We then compared these levels of social capital to the levels of electoral participation in the 23 districts of Western Slovakia and contrary to expectations, these turned out to be in inverse relationship to the levels of social capital (Bušša 2018). That was true especially if we did not take into account the three districts of regional capitals.

In this article we explore the relationship between social capital and one of its expected outcomes, the effectiveness of state. To be precise, we look at how well do municipal offices in Western Slovakia react to the request for information. We chose this particular level of state because it is most likely to reflect the local levels of social capital, since it is elected by the locals and independent in its personal composition from higher levels of politics. Even though there are many possible intervening factors in this relationship, most notably the size of municipalities and recent elections, we still expect a positive correlation between the two variables. Our hypothesis therefore is: In areas with the higher the level of social capital we can expect higher probability for higher effectiveness of local governments.

### 2. Operationalization

The social capital levels are already measured (Bušša 2017) although we used much more complex and reliable method for measuring at the regional level than at the district level. However the two methods gave us very similar results at the regional level: the highest value was in Trnava Region, the middle level was in Nitra Region and the lowest level was in Trenčín Region.

We measured the effectiveness of local governments in January 2019. We considered several ways of measuring effectiveness of municipalities, but many would either require much more researchers in the field visiting the municipalities, which would be costly and also time-consuming or it would require specifically formulated requests for each particular municipality. Therefore we chose to turn to local governments with a set of 12 questions concerning the municipality in the year 2018. This information is any municipality legally bound to give within set time period.

We were not only interested in whether we will get the information, but also whether it would be on time and whether it would be complete. The required information was chosen to be such that it could indicate misuse of powers and it would take some time to put together, but not to overload the smaller municipalities. The idea was to see if the municipalities do respond even to requests that are not easy or pleasant to comply to, simply because that is their task according law. Their effectiveness is expressed by their ability to respond properly.

### 3. Units of Measurement

Although we do have data on effectiveness for individual municipalities, we can not use them for comparison, because we do not have any data for social capital on local level. Therefore we transform the data for municipalities to a composite mean number for the whole district. That is the primary unit of measurement, however we will also use regions in separate comparison. Each municipality has an equal weight because we see their behavior as a consequence of common level of social capital. The number of inhabitants is not important from this point of view. The result is a response rate for the particular district or region.

### 4. Probability Sample

One of the limitations of our research was the great number of municipalities in Western Slovakia, being around one thousand municipalities and cities. And our research actually did encompass all of Slovakia with nearly two thousand nine hundred municipalities and cities. We were not able to communicate with all of them and even less to work with the data from all of them, therefore we decided to work with a simple random sample of all cities and municipalities instead. The sample for Western Slovakia contains 114 municipalities and cities, which is about 13% of all the settlements in the area. For all of Slovakia the sample was 400 municipalities and cities. The sample is big enough to give us general information about spatial distribution of responsive and nonresponsive local governments.

*Figure 1 The levels of effectiveness of local governments for districts (red - low levels, green – high levels)*



Source Research of the author

## 5. The Results

The data for districts in **Table 3**, visualized in **Figure 1**, do not show a conclusive picture. Two things stand out when we look at values for districts. The levels of effectiveness of municipalities in Upper Nitra area are clearly not what our hypothesis would expect them to be. The area is surprisingly among the relatively more responsive ones. The second one is very weak effectiveness level in Piešťany district, even though we measured it the highest level of the density of civic society organizations in Western Slovakia.

At the same time it does not look like the measurement brought us random or meaningless numbers. There are clearly similarities across neighboring districts. The weakest response rate was in a group of districts Skalica, Senica, Piešťany, Myjava and maybe to lesser extent also in Topoľčany and Zlaté Moravce districts. These areas are on the border of our three regions, but mostly in Trnava Region.

**Table 1** The levels of effectiveness of local governments for regions

	Responded	late	Not complete	Total outcome	Of maximum possible	Effectiveness (in %)
<b>Trnava Region</b>	20		-1	19,75	33	59,8%
<b>Nitra Region</b>	31	-2	-1	30,25	41	73,8%
<b>Trenčín Region</b>	26	-1	-1	25,5	35	72,9%

Source Research of the author

At the regional level, the differences are less pronounced. The effectiveness ranges from 59,8% in Trnava Region to 73,8% in Nitra Region, Trenčín Region being very close behind. At the regional level, the correlation between the effectiveness of local governments and the levels of social capital is negative with value -0,91944. Similarly the correlation between the effectiveness of local governments and the density of the network of civic society organizations would be -0,90105. But both these numbers are not relevant, because they were counted for just three cases. We just wanted to illustrate that there does not seem to be positive relationship at regional level with either value of social capital or the density of civic society organizations. The values are shown in the **Table 2**.

**Table 2** The effectiveness of local governments, the density of the network of civic society organizations and the amount of social capital in the regions

Region (VUC)	Density of civic society organizations	Value of social capital	Effectiveness (in %)
<b>Trenčiansky</b>	6,2	3,98	72,90%
<b>Trnavský</b>	7,5	5,95	59,80%
<b>Nitriansky</b>	6,7	4,66	73,80%

Source Bušša (2017)

As we mentioned earlier, we do not have the data for social capital at district level. But we can compare the effectiveness of the local governments to the density of civic society organizations at the district level. The density of civic society organizations is just one component of social capital and therefore must be viewed as a different variable. But it could give us some approximation to the levels of social capital at the district level. As **Table 3** shows us, also these two variables have negative correlation, but a lot weaker. It practically shows no relationship between the variables. So also at district level nothing suggests that our hypotheses is correct.

**Table 3** The effectiveness of local governments and the density of the network of civic society organizations and the amount of social capital in the regions

Civic society organizations density	Effectiveness of local governments	District	Region
0,0059	1	Ilava	TN
0,0067	1	Nové Mesto nad Váhom	TN
0,0051	1	Partizánske	TN
0,0069	1	Galanta	TT
0,0092	1	Nitra	NR
0,0062	1	Šaľa	NR
0,0092	0,94	Trenčín	TN
0,0061	0,89	Nové Zámky	NR
0,009	0,8	Trnava	TT
0,0061	0,75	Prievidza	TN
0,0049	0,67	Bánovce nad Bebravou	TN
0,0065	0,67	Hlohovec	TT
0,0064	0,65	Levice	NR
0,0081	0,6	Dunajská Streda	TT
0,008	0,58	Komárno	NR
0,0055	0,58	Púchov	TN
0,0073	0,5	Zlaté Moravce	NR
0,0066	0,5	Považská Bystrica	TN
0,0051	0,46	Topoľčany	NR
0,0065	0,33	Myjava	TN
0,0093	0,25	Piešťany	TT
0,0067	0,25	Senica	TT
0,0068	0	Skalica	TT
<b>Correlation:</b>	-0,0252		

*Source* Research of the author, Bušša (2017)

## 6. Conclusion

Our hypothesis said that in areas with the higher level of social capital we can expect higher effectiveness of local governments. However we found that data do not support this hypothesis. Both at regional level, and at district level, the correlation was negative. Although at district level the result was closer to showing no relationship rather than a

negative one. So nothing suggests that our hypotheses is correct. This is very interesting result, although not the one we wished for. The reasons for this lack of positive relationship between two phenomena that should reinforce each other could be explained in several ways. The most obvious is that there are other factors influencing the variables in a way that opposes the relationship we measured. Also, our methodology had some shortcomings, which we could not reduce and which could have influenced the result. To rule out methodological causes, we intend to repeat the research with new data using more cases and more kinds of data to measure both variables.

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