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CONTENTS

SCIENTIFIC PAPERS	
Narrative Dynamics in Times of COVID-19 on Facebook: A Quantitative–Qualitative Analysis of Slovak Political Actors Gabriel Eštok, Peter Dubóczy, Sergej Sinicyn	6
Local Government in Ukraine Michal Jesenko, Martina Kantorová, Vadym Prymachuk	49
Parliamentary Museums and Exhibitions in Central Europe Ivan Halász	67
Financing Green Projects: Local Government Approaches and Benefits for Residents Andrea Seňová, Lucia Grosošová, Ivana Tkáčová	75
Financial Administration in the Fight Against Tax Evasion Nora Štangová, Agneša Víghová	93
Heterogeneity of Shared Micromobility Utilization Throughout a Day: A Case Study for the City of Košice Marek Gróf, Radovan Dráb	103
REVIEW	
The Historical Constitution (...) Has Transformed into Legal History Unpublished works of legal scholars on Hungary's historical constitution and constitutional history - Schweitzer Gábor, Szente Zoltán Ivan Halász	119
Environmental Justice in the Context of Social Work - León Richvalský, Jana Levická Tomáš Štuller	122
Register of Authors	124

SCIENTIFIC PAPERS

Narrative Dynamics in Times of COVID-19 on Facebook: A Quantitative–Qualitative Analysis of Slovak Political Actors

Gabriel Eštok, Peter Dubóczy, Sergej Sinicyn

<https://doi.org/10.33542/VSS2025-2-1>

Abstract

The study focuses on the political communication of Slovak political actors on Facebook during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on identifying the major narratives present in political communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, with specific regard to anti-pandemic measures and reflection on their significance in the process of framing public debate, focusing on the most active political actors in the online information environment of the Slovak Republic. The ambition of the research is to examine how individual political representatives and political entities communicated the topic of the pandemic, what types of narratives they used, and to what extent these narratives were successful in generating interactions and shaping political discourse. The research design combines quantitative and qualitative content analysis of posts published on Facebook between 2020 and 2021, with particular attention paid to categories of narratives related to vaccination, testing, masks, treatment, and anti-pandemic measures. The analysis focused on the frequency, structure, and interactivity of individual narratives and compared the sentiment of communication "in favor" and "against" measures as an indicator of attitudes toward the government's management of the pandemic. The results show that social networks—especially Facebook—played a key role in political communication during the pandemic. The discourse was characterized by a high degree of personalization, emotionalization, and polarization. The most successful narratives in terms of generating interaction were those that questioned the legitimacy of the measures. In terms of actors, representatives of the then opposition and anti-system entities dominated, as they were able to effectively address the audience through conflictual and mobilizing narratives. The study confirms that the pandemic crisis created strategic space for the rise of populist and anti-government rhetoric and accelerated the shift of political communication to the online environment. The results point to the continuing one-way nature of political communication on social networks, low levels of citizen participation, and an increased risk of misinformation spreading. The findings contribute to the understanding of how political communication works in crisis situations and offer a theoretical and empirical basis for further research on digital politics, crisis management, and hybrid information threats.

Keywords: political communication, social media, COVID-19, narratives, Slovakia

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected many aspects of society, with the most pronounced impact being felt in the online space. Due to anti-pandemic measures and an appetite for new news during the crisis, people spent significantly more time consuming content on social networks. The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it a paradox, whereby social networks became a space for informing society about the course of the pandemic, anti-pandemic measures, and the availability of vaccinations. At the same time, however, they provided a space for the spread of disinformation and emotionally charged messages. Given that COVID-19 was primarily a health crisis, the primary emotion was fear. Social media users may have felt fear for their lives or health stemming from the disease itself, or fear of losing their freedom or jobs as a result of anti-pandemic measures. Inducing fear is one of the most effective communication strategies.

The aim of this study is to identify the main narratives present in political communication in the online space of Slovakia during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the study, the authors focus on the posts of the most active actors of the individual political parties represented in the National Council of the Slovak Republic during the period under review. To achieve this goal, the authors chose both qualitative (content analysis and interpretation of political communication) and quantitative methods (data analysis).

In terms of theory, the study is grounded in the tradition of research on political communication on social media and in approaches that conceptualize political discourse in terms of framing and narratives. The analysis assumes that political elites strategically use social media to frame crisis situations and to mobilize support or dissatisfaction, relying on direct, personalized and emotionally charged communication. At the same time, the research draws on narrative and framing perspectives which understand public communication as a struggle over interpretive frameworks in which actors select, emphasize and connect certain aspects of reality in order to construct coherent stories about the causes, responsibilities and solutions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This theoretical framework allows us to treat the monitored Facebook posts as narrative constructions that shape public perceptions of the pandemic, anti-pandemic measures and vaccination, and to link their content and sentiment with broader debates on populism, disinformation and trust in institutions.

The analysis focuses not only on the actors of political communication, but also on identifying key narratives, such as the origin of COVID-19, testing, vaccination, and anti-pandemic measures. The study monitors the occurrence of individual narratives and the number of interactions, as well as negative and positive attitudes towards them and the reasons for these attitudes. The study thus offers a comprehensive view of the dynamics of political communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. By analyzing the dominant narratives

and their social response, the authors seek to contribute to the understanding of how political actors framed the public debate on the pandemic. The results of the research aim to shed light on the formation of political discourse in times of crisis and provide an empirical basis for further exploration of the relationship between populism, disinformation, and the effectiveness of political communication on social networks in the Slovak context.

The study is conceived as interdisciplinary research that combines perspectives from political science, sociology, media studies, and psychology. The COVID-19 pandemic was a complex phenomenon with impacts on political decision-making, public opinion, and the mental well-being of the population, which is why the analysis of political communication on social networks is based on knowledge from several scientific disciplines. The innovative approach of the study lies in the combination of qualitative (content analysis, interpretative frameworks) and quantitative methods (analysis of data, interactions, and statistical trends), which enable comprehensive mapping of narratives, their social resonance, and communication effectiveness. Thanks to this methodological integration, the study not only contributes to political science discourse, but is also applicable in the fields of social policy, media studies, and strategic crisis communication.

The structure of the study corresponds to the above-mentioned research levels and objectives. The Literature Review chapter provides a theoretical and contextual framework for examining political communication on social networks during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main theoretical framework of the study combines three complementary perspectives. First, it builds on research on political communication in the digital environment, which highlights the central role of social media in transforming relations between political actors, the media and citizens, and in enabling direct, personalized and often populist forms of communication. Second, it adopts a framing-based understanding of political discourse, according to which political actors interpret the pandemic through specific interpretive frames that define problems, attribute responsibility and suggest normative evaluations and solutions. Third, it employs a narrative approach that treats political communication during COVID-19 as a set of recurrent narrative patterns about the nature of the virus, the legitimacy and effectiveness of anti-pandemic measures, the risks and benefits of vaccination, and the trustworthiness of institutions and experts. Together, these perspectives provide the conceptual basis for the construction of narrative categories used in the empirical part of the study and for the interpretation of how political actors shaped public debate on the pandemic in the Slovak online environment.

It draws on extensive domestic and foreign literature dealing with the transformation of the media environment in the digital age and its impact on political communication, public trust, and the dissemination of information in times of crisis. It also includes an overview of research reflecting the specifics of the Slovak media environment, which underwent a fundamental

transformation during the pandemic—from increased consumption of online content to a significant increase in the influence of social networks as the main channel of political communication. In addition to the research design, the second part focuses on mapping the data set that the authors analyzed after monitoring the specified information environment on the social network Facebook. It contains quantitative data and an interpretation of narrative categories, while also documenting the number of posts published by the monitored actors during the selected period. In the third part, the study focuses on the analysis of narratives used by political actors in Slovakia to communicate about the COVID-19 pandemic and related anti-pandemic measures on Facebook. The ambition of this main chapter of the research is to map the frequency of occurrence of individual types of narratives, their thematic structure, and the level of engagement they generated among users. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, the results show which areas—such as vaccination, testing, treatment, and anti-pandemic measures—dominated online communication and which of them generated the greatest response. The chapter also tracks differences between individual narrative categories according to their sentiment (support vs. rejection of measures) and compares their success in terms of the total number of interactions. The analysis offers a comprehensive view of how political communication during the pandemic translated into specific narrative frameworks and how these frameworks shaped public discourse. The graphical outputs serve as a visual representation of the intensity, trends, and distribution of individual narratives, providing an empirical basis for interpreting broader communication patterns and polarization tendencies in the Slovak online space during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the discussion chapter, the authors present a synthesis of the key findings of the research. Attention is focused on how individual political actors shaped the discourse on the pandemic, which narratives dominated, and what interactions their communication provoked.

1 Literature review

Numerous studies dealing with political communication on social networks are available. For example, the study by Chatterjee and Dutta presents a systematic review of the literature focusing on the impact of social media on political communication, analyzing research from 2000 to 2022 and emphasizing that social networks have fundamentally changed the way political actors communicate with the public, shifting attention away from traditional political parties to individual leaders (Chatterjee and Dutta 2024). An analysis of the impact of social media on political communication, particularly in the context of the revolutionary changes that these platforms have brought to the way political actors communicate, is presented in a study by Deželana and Vobić. The authors emphasize that social networks enable political actors to communicate directly and immediately with voters

without the mediation of traditional media, thereby changing the dynamics of political communication. This study focuses not only on new forms of interaction and voter mobilization through social networks, but also on challenges such as negative campaigns and the spread of misinformation in the digital space. It points out that social media are also changing the content of political communication, which is increasingly personalized and focused on building a direct relationship with the audience (Deželan and Vobić 2016). A study by Ernst et al. offers an interesting analysis of the use of Facebook and Twitter by extremist and populist parties in six selected countries. From the perspective of political communication on social media, the study points out that these platforms allow populist parties to bypass traditional media intermediaries and communicate directly with their voters through personalized and targeted messages. (Ernst et al. 2017) From the perspective of political communication on social networks, the study by DePaula and Hansson emphasizes how government posts are linguistically adapted for political purposes, often using rhetoric that polarizes and politicizes social issues, offering a case study that shows specific ways in which government institutions use social media to influence political discourse and public opinion. (DePaula and Hansson 2025) The study by Durotoye, Goyanes, Berganza, and De Zúñiga examines political participation on social networks and online environments from the perspective of different platforms and social ties of discussants, emphasizing that the use of different platforms has different effects on political discourse and citizen engagement. This study offers a comprehensive theoretical and methodological framework for understanding the impact of social media on political participation. (Durotoye et al. 2025)

Several studies and research teams have also focused on political communication on social networks in the Slovak Republic. Štefančík offered a theoretical perspective on the functioning of social networks as a tool for political communication and propaganda in Slovakia. (Štefančík 2002). Although the study by Butoracová Šindlerová and Garaj focuses on the potential use of political party websites in the context of political communication in Slovakia before the 2020 elections, from the perspective of new media, this study is important because it illustrates how political entities combine traditional online tools (websites) with social networks to communicate effectively with their voters. (Butoracová Šindlerová and Garaj 2022). The language used by Slovak politicians on social networks is the subject of an article by Eva Stradiotová, which reflects on the specifics of political discourse in the digital environment. The author analyzes the statements of primarily populist politicians on Facebook and emphasizes how these statements use emotive and polarizing language to influence public opinion. Social networks serve not only as a tool for directly addressing voters, but also as a platform for spreading political views and mobilizing support. (Stradiotová 2021)

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter acted as a bridge between public authorities communicating about the crisis and

the public seeking information. Political leaders themselves, regardless of their political affiliation or position in government in individual countries, also played a significant role in this communication. A study by Mohamed Nour and Adnan Kisu provides an overview of the communication strategies of political leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic in countries with high infection rates. In terms of political communication on social media, the study highlights how leaders used these platforms to inform the public immediately and directly about pandemic measures, as well as to build trust in times of crisis. (Mohamed Nour and Kisa 2024) Jurkevičienė and Bičkutė also analyzed the communication strategies of political leaders on social media during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in their study. This study emphasizes the importance of transparent and effective crisis communication, which was key to managing public trust and reducing uncertainty in society. The authors examine how political leaders used social media to inform citizens, build solidarity, and strengthen their legitimacy during the pandemic. They emphasize the ability to adapt communication strategies in response to the ever-changing conditions of the pandemic. (Jurkevičienė and Bičkutė 2022). The importance of transparency and consistency in politicians' messages on Twitter, which helped to alleviate uncertainty and promote responsible citizen behavior, was analyzed in a study by Rufai and Bunce. The study provides important insights into the effectiveness of social media as a crisis communication tool and its impact on political legitimacy during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Rufai and Bunce 2020) Wei Sun's study presents an introductory overview of a special issue of a journal dedicated to media and communication dynamics during the COVID-19 pandemic. From the perspective of political communication on social networks, it highlights the challenges faced by communicators in the context of rapidly changing information, the emergence of misinformation, and the need to maintain public trust. The author points to the importance of effective, transparent, and empathetic communication, which can help mitigate the negative social impacts of the pandemic while promoting civic engagement. (Sun 2021) This is why effective crisis communication by political leaders has come to be considered extremely important for managing the pandemic, gaining public trust, and encouraging citizens to take the necessary measures.

However, research into political communication in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic has also revealed instances where political communication has had a negative impact on society. A systematic review documents a study by a group of authors led by Ferreira Caceres, which analyzes the spread of false information on social networks leading to vaccine refusal, disregard for measures, and questioning of scientific authorities, which significantly complicated the management of the pandemic. (Ferreira Caceres et al. 2022) Expanding on these findings, Arman and Yukaru provide a more nuanced understanding of the psychological and political mechanisms underlying vaccine hesitancy. Their research reveals that vaccine hesitancy does not emerge solely from exposure to misinformation, but rather through a

complex serial mediation process involving loss of control during pandemic, distrust in authorities, conspiracy mentality, dichotomous thinking, and intolerance of uncertainty. This psycho-political framework demonstrates that individuals who experience a sense of losing control due to pandemic restrictions become more prone to distrust authorities, which subsequently enhances conspiracy mentality and dichotomous worldviews—ultimately leading to vaccine hesitancy. Notably, the study found that distrust in authorities acts as a critical mediator between loss of control and conspiracy mentality, suggesting that rebuilding institutional trust is essential for counteracting vaccine hesitancy during public health crises. (Arman and Yukaru 2025) Other authors analyze, for example, the crisis communication strategy of authorities on social networks during COVID-19 and point to its ineffectiveness, which contributed to mistrust and weaker public participation. (Song et al. 2025) Dienlin focused on the negative effects of excessive use of social media during the pandemic crisis on psychological well-being, which subsequently weakens society's ability to deal with crisis situations. (Dienlin 2025) A study by a group of authors addressed the flood of contradictory information during lockdown on social media, leading to uncertainty and a loss of trust in public institutions. (Masambuka-Kanchewa et al. 2024) The pandemic created a strategic environment for the spread of misinformation and political propaganda, with social networks serving as "echo chambers." Political discourse during the crisis had a significant impact on the spread of hoaxes and misinformation, which was a global phenomenon, as evidenced by a number of other publications available in scientific databases. (Pérez-Curiel and Velasco Molpeceres 2020) (Goban-Klas 2020)

During the period under review, populist and anti-scientific rhetoric by politicians was strongly present. (Burni et al. 2023) Among other things, populism is characterized by its understanding of society as divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups – the "pure people" versus the "corrupt elite." Key dimensions of populism include people-centrism, anti-elitism, and popular sovereignty. It is assumed that real or artificially created crises represent an opportunity for the rise of populism. Although the COVID-19 pandemic was an unforeseen, exogenous shock that was not directly attributable to the usual targets of populist discourse (political or economic elites), populists actively sought to use the crisis as a tool to strengthen their political positions. Therefore, this aspect of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has become the subject of several studies. (Moniz et al. 2024) (Resende 2021) One of their main agendas was the trend to intentionally blur the lines between labelling states a failing or fragile one, when in reality the term flailing state should be used. This evokes a rather unstable environment where it's easier to work with emotions of the target group. (Jakabovič 2025, 121-128) Overall, it has been shown that the COVID-19 crisis has forced populist leaders to adapt their discourse. Among other things, in many democratic states, political representatives with

populist tendencies, mostly in opposition, have sought to politicize the pandemic, often focusing on the managerial failures of governments. (Bobba and Hubé 2021)

In general, we can conclude that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the media environment was characterized by several key aspects:

- Increased media consumption – Media consumption increased in general, especially news related to the development of the pandemic; (Tench et al. 2023, 135)
- Lack of credible sources – Many people had trouble finding credible sources and reliable information; (Tench et al. 2023, 116)
- Infodemic – the pandemic was accompanied by an "infodemic," which is an excessive amount of information, some of which was accurate and some of which was not, making it difficult for people to find credible sources and reliable advice; (Tench et al. 2023, 35) (Maarek 2022, 24)
- Spread of misinformation – misinformation and conspiracy theories related to COVID-19; (Tench et al. 2023, 35)
- Change in media use – social media use increased, but traditional media retained its importance as a source of relevant and verified news; (Tench et al. 2023, 74)
- Impact on mental health – media use and information consumption had a widespread impact on individuals' lives during the pandemic, particularly during lockdown periods; (Tench et al. 2023, 36)
- Pursuit of transparency – traditional media demanded a more transparent flow of information from government officials, with varying effects across different states and groups; (Tench et al. 2023, 135)
- The role of fact-checking – fact-checking and access to reliable sources of health information were key to protecting public health and safety; (Oswald et al. 2022, 66)
- Politicization of the pandemic - In some states, communication was linked to political goals, which affected public trust; (Maarek 2022, 344)
- Trust in government vs. experts – Unlike in other contexts, citizens in some countries placed greater trust in governments than in experts as sources of information. (Tench et al. 2023, 214)

The situation was similar in Slovakia. The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic had a profound impact on people's lives and led to changes in media behavior. As a result of the anti-pandemic measures and lockdown, most people spent more time at home. During this period, there was a significant increase in the use of the internet and online media in Slovakia. According to research by the MEDIAN SK agency, Slovaks spent 35 minutes more time using the internet between March 16 and April 19, 2020, compared to the pre-crisis period. (Čech et al. 2020) In the context of Slovakia, online media and the internet proved to be an important

source of information. In 2020, more than 490,000 articles on COVID-19 and the coronavirus were published in the Slovak media, with online media accounting for the largest share (426,423 articles). There was also a significant increase in interactions on social networks, which reached almost 32,850,000 interactions in 2020, with the highest number of interactions in March 2020 (9,589,471). (Krajčovič 2021, 2–3) Despite the massive use of social networks to obtain information during this period, social media ended up with the lowest credibility rating among the monitored media in Slovakia in 2021. (Teraz.sk 2021)

We find it interesting that although disinformation spread by well-known figures (e.g., politicians and celebrities) accounted for only 20% of the total amount of disinformation output in Slovakia, it accounted for as much as 69% of all interactions on social networks. Furthermore, trust in conspiracy theories and disinformation related to COVID-19 was exceptionally high in Slovakia. (Sámelová et al. 2021, 130–31). During this period, Facebook did not verify the truthfulness or falsity of statements made by active politicians or political parties because it did not want to interfere with democratic competition and restrict freedom of speech. This fact provides an important framework for understanding the communication of political leaders, who were thus able to use the platform without Facebook fact-checking their own statements. Other entities active on Facebook, which performed some of the functions of journalism, therefore also played a key role in the fight against the "infodemic." Among the active fighters against disinformation were government and police profiles, e.g. the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic, which used Facebook to regularly publish official and verified information, actively explained medical processes, and explicitly refuted hoaxes related to COVID-19, but also, for example, the Facebook page Hoaxes and Scams – Slovak Police, which saw the largest increase in fans during the first wave of the pandemic (March 2020) and also during the second wave (October 2020), actively refuting misinformation related to the pandemic and testing.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovakia highlighted the importance of Facebook as the primary communication channel for political leaders, serving not only to inform the public about government measures, but also for political struggle, polarization of society, and the dissemination or refutation of disinformation. The internet, websites, and social networks serve as platforms where political entities or individuals present their views, attitudes, and ideological principles on social and political issues independently and at any time. Social networks have their own specific logic, which is based on virality, leading political actors to spread messages that users "like," comment on, and share. Social networks represent a new channel of political communication with advantages such as the possibility of interactivity and obtaining feedback from the electorate. At the same time, they make it possible to bypass the control mechanisms of traditional media (so-called gatekeeping). The advantages and risks of using social networks for political communication have received sufficient attention in the scientific community. (Ernst

et al. 2017) (Školkay and Daniš 2022) At the same time, analyses of political communication often point to Facebook and Twitter as the most frequently studied platforms. (Butoracová Šindleryová and Garaj 2022)

A similar trend was also visible in Slovakia, reinforced by the fact that the Slovak political scene has long been unstable and fragmented, with a marked personalization of politics and the frequent emergence of new political entities. New parties often innovate in the areas of political promotion, campaigning, and communication. Among the parties that have established themselves in Slovakia and distinguished themselves from traditional parties are, for example, Freedom and Solidarity (SaS), Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO), SIETĚ, and SME RODINA. Moreover, even before the pandemic, political entities such as SaS (Freedom and Solidarity) in Slovakia tended to use modern forms of communication, including social networks (especially Facebook), to reach voters, especially the younger generation. Political entities in Slovakia were often characterized by strong leadership and innovative approaches to promotion. (Hynčica et al. 2018) During the pandemic, the core of political leaders' communication shifted to the online space, especially Facebook, which they began to use even more frequently to broadcast political messages. The pandemic hit Slovakia at a time of change in the government, which also influenced the media discourse. (Sámelová et al. 2021) Facebook was often the preferred platform for populist communication on social networks during this period, especially among opposition parties and actors on the political extremes, because it offers a higher level of proximity, reciprocity, and non-elitist character. (Ernst et al. 2017)

In the online environment, and especially in Slovakia, the increase in misinformation has led to a so-called infodemic. Politicians were perceived by the public as the biggest spreaders of false and misleading news about COVID-19. Misinformation and conspiracy theories can damage human health, undermine social cohesion, and threaten democracy. In this context, Facebook faced criticism for its insufficient efforts to limit the spread of false news. (Sámelová et al. 2021) Findings suggest that Slovak political parties have moved to social media during the pandemic, but overall, online communication is still characterized by a one-way flow of information from sender to recipient, with a lack of voter engagement. (Butoracová Šindleryová and Garaj 2022) The Covid-19 pandemic period also provided space for the use of disinformation as a tool for building the influence of foreign states within Slovak society, an example of which was the effort to cultivate a positive image of China in the Slovak political discourse (Dvorský 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic forced political leaders to make more intensive use of social media for communication. These platforms enabled them to spread direct and strategic messages. Populists saw the crisis as an opportunity to sensationalize failures (of science, institutions, experts) and politicize issues such as masks and lockdowns. Social media thus

played a key role not only in informing the public, but also in polarizing society and spreading conflicting political narratives.

2 Methodology

The research focuses on the systematic monitoring, analysis, and evaluation of political communication on Facebook in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and related anti-pandemic measures. The authors of the study approach this issue with the conviction that the pandemic was one of the key moments in the current Slovak political reality, significantly influencing the character of the social atmosphere and the way in which political entities interact with the public. Alongside the migration crisis and the war in Ukraine, it is also one of the most significant communication tests of the last decade—a test that has examined the state's capacity for strategic communication and at the same time created space for actors who distort public debate. The authors' ambition is to describe how public discourse was shaped during this period and what role individual political representatives played in it. They therefore view the presented research as a topic with significant interdisciplinary overlaps, applicable not only in political science, but also in sociology, psychology, security studies, and other social science disciplines.

The study aims to conduct interpretative research that allows for a parallel examination of the qualitative nature of political communication while mapping the occurrence and dynamics of key narratives over time. Methodologically, it is therefore based on two complementary levels: a qualitative component, which includes content analysis and interpretation of communication strategies, and a quantitative component, focused on measuring the incidence and effectiveness of individual narratives. The emphasis on Facebook stems from its dominant position in the Slovak online environment, as well as from the fact that it is a medium that has long faced criticism for insufficient regulation of content distribution. The research is also based on the assumption that social networks are one of the most important tools for 21st-century politicians to inform the public and influence political preferences.

The aim of the research is to identify the major narratives present in political communication during the COVID -19 pandemic, with specific regard to anti-pandemic measures, and to reflect on their significance in the process of framing public debate, focusing on the most active political actors in the online information environment of the Slovak Republic. The partial levels of the author's efforts reflect the following complex research questions, which the research attempts to answer:

- What narratives were used in the political communication of the monitored actors to communicate the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic and anti-pandemic measures? To what extent was the topic communicated by individual narratives?
- Which narratives were the most effective in political communication, or rather, which ones received the most interaction?
- Which of the monitored actors were the most active in political communication? Which actors were the most effective?

Beyond these goals, the study seeks to advance existing research conceptually, empirically and analytically. Conceptually, it refines the application of framing and narrative perspectives to crisis-related political communication by systematically linking narrative categories to sentiment, engagement and party-system position. Empirically and analytically, it offers a longitudinal mapping of COVID-19 narratives in the Facebook communication of Slovak political leaders and shows how combining qualitative interpretation with quantitative indicators reveals how populist and anti-system actors capitalize on health crises.

The research was conducted in several interrelated phases. In the initial stage, the authors focused on the systematic collection of data, which was then subjected to analytical processing. The primary dataset was obtained using the Gerulata Juno monitoring tool (provided by Gerulata Technologies), designed to monitor communication on social networks, detect sentiment, and visualize data patterns. In one specific case—when monitoring Igor Matovič, who uses a private profile on Facebook and whose content cannot be monitored by Juno—the authors supplemented the data using the CrowdTangle platform (available from Meta until August 14, 2024). The data collection itself was carried out on July 25, 2023, and included posts published between March 1, 2020, and February 22, 2022. In addition to the time frame, two other selection criteria were applied during data collection.

The monitoring did not focus on the entire Slovak- language space, but on a predefined group of political actors. This list was compiled on the basis of parliamentary political entities that were present in the National Council of the Slovak Republic during the period under review. One representative was selected for each political entity – the politician with the highest number of followers at the time of data collection. It is important to note that the list of actors does not only reflect the results of the 2020 parliamentary elections; it also includes representatives of political entities that were formed or established during the period under review. This approach was particularly relevant in the context of the fragmentation of the Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko party at the beginning of 2021. Overall, the research focused on 11 actors, which are listed in the table below (Table 1).

Last but not least, another criterion for data collection was that the monitored and subsequently analyzed content was searched for based on a list of keywords or through a specific search query, which was as follows: pandemic OR anti-pandemic OR testing OR

vaccination OR vaccine OR mask OR respirator OR corona OR coronavirus OR covid OR antigen OR muzzle. OR expresses a logical function that allows content to be searched based on a conjunction relationship. The query also contained inflected forms and other variations of keywords that corresponded to the linguistics of the Slovak language.

The sampling strategy was designed to capture the core of Facebook-based political communication about COVID-19 in Slovakia. By focusing on the most followed representatives of parliamentary parties and newly formed entities, the dataset reflects actors with the greatest potential to shape public debate during the pandemic. The keyword-based query ensured thematic relevance by including only posts with substantive references to the pandemic, anti-pandemic measures, testing or vaccination.

Table 1: Monitored actors and their political affiliation

ACTOR	POLITICAL ENTITY (at the time of data collection)
Ľuboš Blaha	SMER-SD
Peter Pellegrini	Hlas-SD
Marián Kotleba	Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko
Milan Mazurek	Republika
Tomáš Valášek	Progresívne Slovensko
Miroslav Kollár	SPOLU
Richard Sulík	Sloboda a solidarita
Igor Matovič	Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti (OĽaNO)
Boris Kollár	SME Rodina
Tomáš Taraba	Život-Národná strana
Veronika Remišová	Za ľudí

Source: Authors' work

After completing the data collection, the authors proceeded to manually annotate the data. The content analysis focused exclusively on posts with text content or those that contained visuals accompanied by text. Videos and other multimedia content formats were therefore not included in the analysis. In the next step, the posts were classified according to two main criteria: thematic relevance and content type. The purpose of this preliminary data classification was to minimize potential research limitations (specified below) and to create a consistent basis for further analytical and interpretative work.

- Relevant posts – content and topic related to the COVID-19 pandemic, content was in text form.
- Irrelevant posts – either the content did not relate to the COVID-19 pandemic or was in a form other than text.
- Posts without narrative – content and topic focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, content was in text form. However, they only touched on the monitored topic marginally/secondarily, or presented it in a news format (neutral and without narrative)

Based on an initial orientation in the data, the authors then created a set of narrative categories. The specific narratives are listed below. They were defined on an ongoing basis during the analysis.

The categorization of narratives served as an analytical framework for grasping the content elements of political communication. In the context of political discourse, narratives represent structured interpretive patterns or stories that give meaning, coherence, and emotional charge to political events, policies, or actors. They are not limited to presenting facts—rather, they place them in a framework that is compatible with the values, identity, and emotions of the audience. Narratives shape the way the public interprets political issues through emotional resonance (e.g., fear, anger, hope), the construction of group identity ("us" versus "them"), and the offering of morally charged explanations and solutions.

This system of categories made it possible not only to qualitatively delimit the content, but also to quantitatively visualize the ways in which the political actors monitored framed the COVID-19 pandemic. The coding procedure combined deductive and inductive elements. An initial codebook based on research on crisis framing, populist communication and COVID-19 narratives was iteratively refined during pilot coding. A total of 16 categories of narratives were identified, which are listed together with their description and number of cases in Table 2. The number of cases corresponds to the number of posts in which a given narrative was detected at least once—even in situations where its elements appeared repeatedly within a single post, only one occurrence was counted. This system of categories operationalizes the theoretical assumptions of framing and narrative approaches, translating abstract concepts about interpretive frames and stories into empirically observable types of narratives in Facebook posts.

Table 2: Monitored narratives. Descriptions and counts

NARRATIVE	DESCRIPTION OF THE NARRATIVE	NUMBER OF CASES
COVID as a mild illness	COVID-19 presented as a common illness similar to the flu; downplaying risks and rejecting the need for fundamental measures.	80
COVID as a severe illness	COVID-19 framed as a serious disease posing a high risk to society; appeal for responsibility and respect for expert recommendations.	24
COVID does not exist	Denying the very existence of the virus; considering the pandemic to be a media or political construct.	5
Artificial origin of COVID – from the USA	Claims that the virus was created or released by the United States for geopolitical or economic dominance.	3
Artificial origin of COVID – from China	The virus understood as the result of a Chinese experiment or a laboratory leak; geopolitical criticism of China.	2
Natural origin of COVID	The pandemic interpreted as a natural (uncontrolled) phenomenon.	0
COVID leaked from a laboratory	The virus is considered to be the product of a laboratory accident; the narrative links scientific research with global risk.	11
COVID as a tool to restrict freedom	The pandemic understood as a pretext for introducing totalitarian measures and controlling the population.	50
COVID as a tool for population reduction	Conspiracy narrative about plans to reduce the population through virus or vaccinations.	5
TESTING – generally positive	Testing presented as an effective tool for controlling the pandemic and a manifestation of social responsibility.	77
TESTING – generally negative	Testing is seen as ineffective, unnecessary, and bureaucratically unmanageable.	211
TESTING as unnecessary	Rejection of testing as an unnecessary intrusion into citizens' lives with no real benefit.	114
TESTING with hidden motives	Conspiracy theories claiming that testing is used for surveillance, data collection, or to harm people's health.	116
VACCINATION – generally positive	Vaccination is seen as a scientific achievement and the most effective form of protection against the virus.	104
VACCINATION – generally negative	Vaccination associated with mistrust, fears, and criticism of political decision-making.	103
VACCINATION – negative because it does not work	Vaccination considered ineffective as virus continues to spread.	84
VACCINATION – negative because it is harmful	Claims about harmful or fatal consequences of vaccination.	70
VACCINATION – negative because of hidden motives	Conspiracy claims about vaccination aimed at population control or political manipulation.	31

VACCINATION – negative because of pharmaceutical company interests	Criticism of vaccination as a tool for pharmaceutical corporations to make a profit.	46
VACCINATION WITH EMA approval – generally positive	Vaccines approved by the EMA are presented as proven, safe, and scientifically sound.	20
VACCINATION WITH EMA approval – generally negative	The EMA is perceived as a bureaucratic institution serving political or economic interests, which does not guarantee the quality of vaccines.	3
VACCINATION WITH EMA approval – negative because it does not work	Criticism of vaccines approved by the EMA for their insufficient effectiveness; claims that vaccinated people still got sick.	20
VACCINATION WITH EMA approval – negative because it is harmful	EMA vaccines labeled as harmful to health; warning about side effects and health risks.	41
VACCINATION WITH EMA approval – negative because of hidden motives	EMA-approved vaccines presented as a tool for political manipulation and population control; emphasis on loss of personal freedom.	4
VACCINATION WITH EMA approval – negative because of pharmaceutical company interests	The EMA is perceived as an institution influenced by pharmaceutical corporations; vaccination is seen as a source of profit rather than public good.	47
VACCINATION WITHOUT EMA approval – generally positive	Non-Western vaccines (e.g., Sputnik V) presented as fast and reliable, and occasionally as an expression of national sovereignty.	51
VACCINATION WITHOUT EMA approval – generally negative	Rejection of uncertified vaccines due to their unverified nature and geopolitical risks.	12
VACCINATION WITHOUT EMA approval – negative because it does not work	Criticism of the effectiveness of uncertified vaccines due to a lack of clinical evidence and verified data.	1
VACCINATION WITHOUT EMA approval – negative because it is harmful	Warnings about health risks and side effects of unproven vaccines; reinforcing fear and uncertainty.	2
VACCINATION WITHOUT EMA approval – negative because of hidden motives	Uncertified vaccines presented as a tool of foreign political influence (especially Russia and China).	0
VACCINATION WITHOUT EMA approval – negative because of pharmaceutical company interests	Criticism of uncertified vaccines as a product of the economic and power interests of foreign pharmaceutical companies.	0

MASKS/RESPIRATORS – support for use	Wearing masks is seen as a sign of solidarity, responsibility, and respect for scientific recommendations.	45
MASKS/RESPIRATORS – opposition to use	Face masks are considered a symbol of oppression, an ineffective measure, or a threat to personal freedom.	51
ANTI-PANDEMIC MEASURES – supportive	Government measures perceived as necessary and morally right for the protection of health.	268
ANTI-PANDEMIC MEASURES – opposing	Criticism of measures as excessive, unprofessional, and harmful to society.	513
ANTI-PANDEMIC MEASURES as restriction of freedom / totalitarianism	Pandemic measures presented as a tool of state control and suppression of democracy.	510
ANTI-PANDEMIC MEASURES as a tool for enrichment / corruption	Measures interpreted as a means for financial gain by elites and political groups.	119
ANTI-PANDEMIC MEASURES as a threat to the economy	Criticism of measures for their negative impact on the economy, business, and employment.	107
TREATMENT – classical/modern medicine (positive)	Support for conventional medicine, trust in science and health authorities.	10
TREATMENT – natural remedies (herbs, nuts, garlic)	Preference for natural and home remedies over modern medicine.	2
TREATMENT – veterinary medicines (e.g., Ivermectin)	A conviction that the system deliberately blocks cheap and effective treatment alternatives. Recommendations for the use of veterinary medicine.	41
TREATMENT – medicines intended for other diseases	Claims that there are other effective drugs that are originally intended for other diseases, but their effectiveness is concealed by pharmaceutical interests.	4
TREATMENT – other/general	Various other dubious recommendations that fall outside the scope of classical, modern, and recommended medicine.	13

Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

The analysis of narratives was carried out on two complementary levels – quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative part focused on the occurrence of individual narratives during the period under review. The authors monitored not only the frequency of their occurrence, but also the temporal contexts in which they appeared and their links to specific social or political events that created space for their communication. The aim was to identify the narratives that appeared most prominently in the discourse and contributed most to shaping the public debate on the pandemic. The qualitative part of the analysis followed up on these findings by identifying and examining key narratives in detail. In this part, emphasis was placed on recognizing sub-narratives through which political actors shaped the discourse within the

individual main narratives. The annotation process was preceded by the identification of key narratives resulting from the initial analysis of the available dataset. Each contribution could also contain several (sub)narratives, reflecting the natural complexity of political communication. The result is a logically and thematically hierarchical system of narratives that allows for:

1. thematic categorization (e.g., individual categories/areas of narratives),
2. value differentiation (positive/negative/neutral/conspiratorial frameworks),
3. specification of reason or motive (e.g., because it does not work, because it is harmful, because of ulterior motives, because of the interests of pharmaceutical companies).

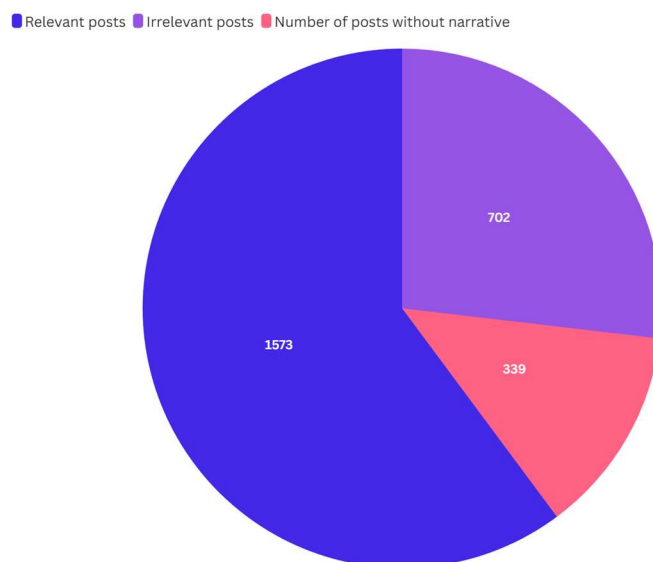
In other words, the system is two-tiered:

- Primary category = thematic frame (e.g., vaccination, measures, treatment).
- Secondary category = attitude or type of framing (e.g., positive, negative, conspiratorial, economic, ethical).

The authors also emphasize that the aim of the research is not to assess the truthfulness of the analyzed content, but to capture and describe its frequency within the overall communication activity—that is, how often individual narratives appeared in the monitored posts. The quantitative part of the analysis therefore focuses primarily on two basic indicators: the level of communication activity (number of posts published) and the effectiveness of communication (number of interactions generated). In this study, interactions are understood as the sum of reactions, comments, and shares. When working with this indicator, the authors assume that a larger volume of interactions potentially reflects a wider reach of content, either through organic dissemination or as a result of algorithmic recommendations. From the perspective of political communication, which can be seen as a process of exchanging information, attitudes, and symbolic messages between political actors and the public, a higher number of interactions is an indicator of an increased ability to influence the audience, mobilize support, or legitimize political action.

The research was accompanied by certain limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting the results. The first is the use of interactions as the primary metric of reach. Although they provide important quantitative data on audience engagement, they do not always automatically reflect the quality of content reception or its actual impact on public opinion. Another limitation is the manual annotation of data, which allows for deeper analysis and more accurate interpretation of context, but poses the risk of subjective differences between annotators. To minimize the potential differences in interpretative approaches among the authors, a shared manual with a clear operationalization of the analyzed narratives was developed prior to the analysis. Subsequently, a pilot annotation of a selected subset of the data was conducted independently by all three authors, which allowed for the identification and clarification of ambiguous categories. During the annotation process, cases of interpretative

uncertainty were addressed through collective discussion and consensus among the authors. Although manual annotation inevitably involves a certain degree of subjectivity, the procedures adopted substantially enhanced the consistency and reliability of the analytical process. Limitations also apply to the data collection process itself. Not all relevant posts may have been identified due to the limitations of search queries, which, even when carefully configured, may not capture all variations of the topics being monitored. Technical limitations of monitoring tools—data availability, indexing methods, and algorithmic content processing—also play a role and may affect the completeness and representativeness of the analyzed sample. Despite these limitations, the study provides a comprehensive and analytically valuable view of the phenomenon under investigation. It creates a methodological framework that can be further developed and refined in future research, while providing relevant insights into the dynamics of political communication during the pandemic.

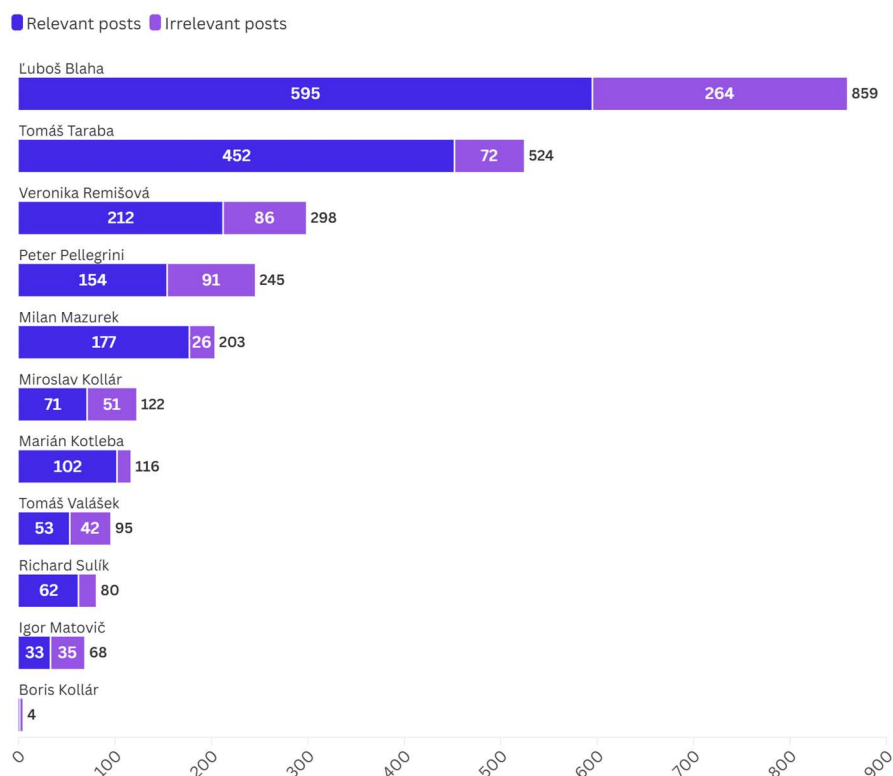


Graph 1: Number and typology of posts in research

Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

Based on a search using the above parameters, the authors obtained a data set containing a total of 2,614 posts. These were published on Facebook by the actors monitored between March 1, 2020, and February 22, 2022. Based on the subsequent distillation of text content that was thematically relevant to the research, the final data set that was then analyzed consisted of 1,912 posts. In this set of posts, 339 posts were subsequently identified as not containing narratives relevant to the research. Most of these were posts that, although related to the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic and anti-pandemic measures, did not link to the monitored discursive frameworks or interpretative intentions. This means that the majority of posts were relevant ($n = 1573$), i.e., those that were directly related to the topic of the pandemic or anti-pandemic measures and contained a recognizable narrative. It can be said that the

dominance of relevant posts confirms that the topic has become an important element of public discourse, in which actors not only reported on the development of the situation, but also actively interpreted it through various narratives. Narratively neutral posts, on the other hand, indicate the presence of communication strategies aimed at maintaining a formal or non-political tone, which served a stabilizing or complementary function in the discourse.



Graph 2: Number of posts by individual actors according to relevance

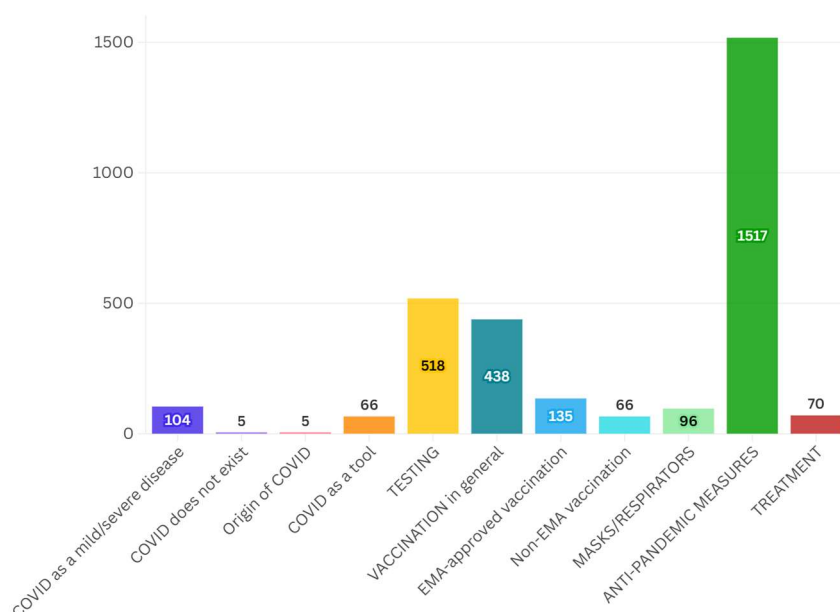
Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

During the monitored period, L'uboš Blaha was the most active actor, publishing a total of 595 relevant posts on the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic. This figure clearly confirms his dominant presence in the online space and his high level of engagement with the topic. He is followed by Tomáš Taraba with 452 thematically relevant posts, making him one of the most prominent communicators of the pandemic in terms of the volume of published content. As for other actors, Veronika Remišová (212 relevant out of 298 posts) and Peter Pellegrini (154 relevant out of 245) occupy the leading positions. Both communicated continuously about the pandemic, albeit in different contexts—Remišová mainly in connection with defending government procedures and measures, Pellegrini more from a position of moderate criticism. Other prominent figures were Milan Mazurek (177 relevant posts), who was one of the most vocal critics of the official pandemic policy, and Miroslav Kollár (71 relevant posts), whose communication was at the opposite end of the spectrum – within the framework of more pro-

state arguments. Interestingly, despite their positions in the government, names such as Richard Sulík (62 relevant posts), Igor Matovič (33), and Boris Kollár (4) appear at the bottom of the list. Their lower communication activity suggests that during the period covered by the analysis, the topic of the pandemic took a back seat in their communication, or that they communicated about it through channels other than social media. Overall, it can be said that the communication activity of political representatives on the topic of the pandemic was very unevenly distributed—opposition or systemically critical actors dominated significantly, suggesting that the pandemic was used as a space for forming alternative, often polarizing discourse in the online environment.

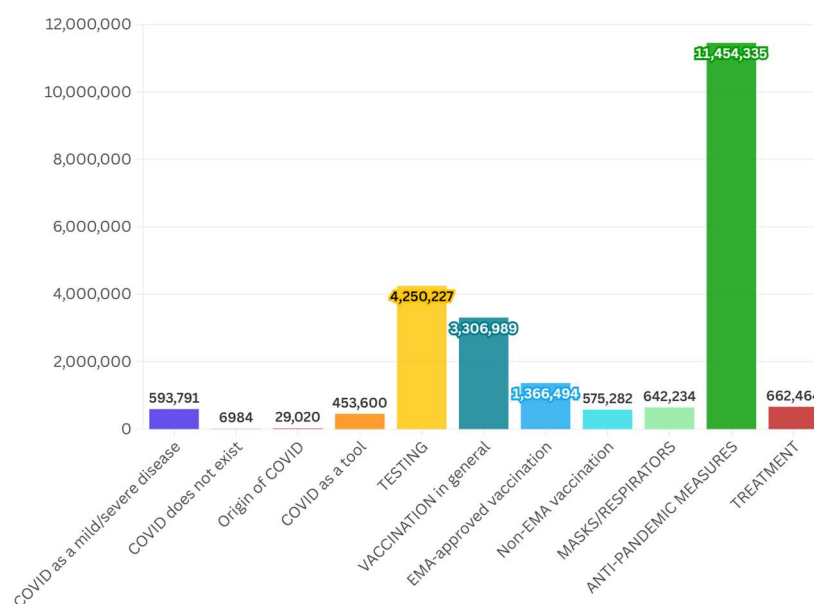
3 Results

The following section focuses on analyzing the thematic categories of narratives that shaped political communication about the COVID-19 pandemic in the Slovak information space. The aim is to identify which types of narratives dominated the discourse, how they differed in terms of content, and what level of social response they elicited. The graphs show the frequency of occurrence of individual narratives and the volume of interactions they generated, allowing for a comparison of communication activity and effectiveness across thematic areas—from the perception of the virus itself, through vaccination and measures, to treatment and individual approaches to the pandemic.



Graph 3: Number of posts by individual groups of monitored narratives
Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

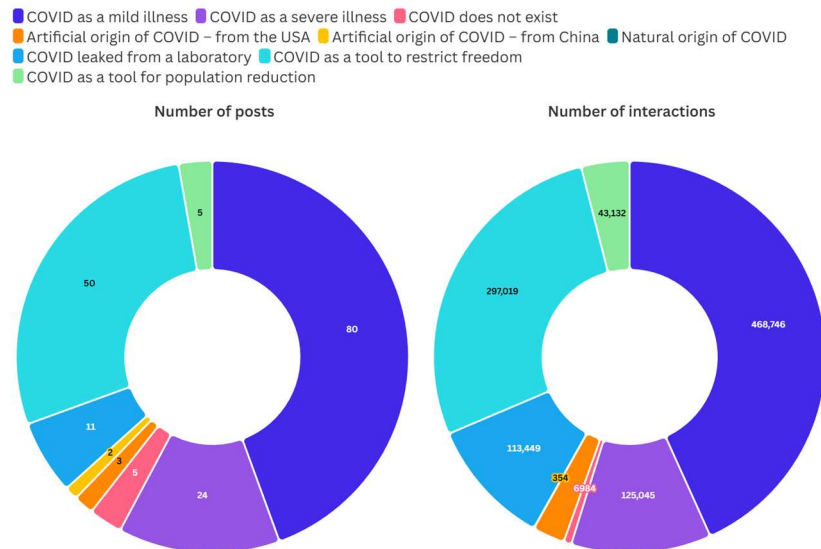
Graph 3 depicts the distribution of identified narratives in the political communication of the monitored actors during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data show a significant dominance of narratives related to anti-pandemic measures ($n = 1517$), which were the most frequently discussed topic in the analyzed period. These narratives became the main tool for interpreting the crisis situation and a space where political actors most intensively formulated their positions on state management and restrictions affecting the daily lives of citizens. This is followed by narratives about testing ($n = 518$) and narratives about vaccination in general ($n = 438$), which together indicate that the discourse focused heavily on issues of health policy, trust in scientific institutions, and the legitimacy of government decisions. Vaccination linked to certification by the European Medicines Agency ($n = 135$) and outside it ($n = 66$) suggests that the topic of vaccination also had a geopolitical dimension, becoming a space for formulating Slovakia's attitudes towards Western and non-Western actors. To a lesser extent, there were narratives related to the disease itself—its severity ($n = 104$) or origin ($n = 5$)—which were more complementary or secondary in nature. COVID-19 as a tool ($n = 66$), treatment ($n = 70$), and masks or respirators ($n = 96$) constituted marginal, albeit symbolically significant, areas of discourse, reflecting the range of typologies of framing – from the creation of conspiracy theories, through charlatan recommendations, to rejection. In terms of interpretation, the graph confirms that political communication during the period under review focused primarily on crisis management and the state's response, rather than on the medical or scientific aspects of the pandemic. Narratives about measures, testing, and vaccination formed the core of public discourse.



Graph 4: Number of interactions generated by posts according to individual groups of monitored narratives

Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

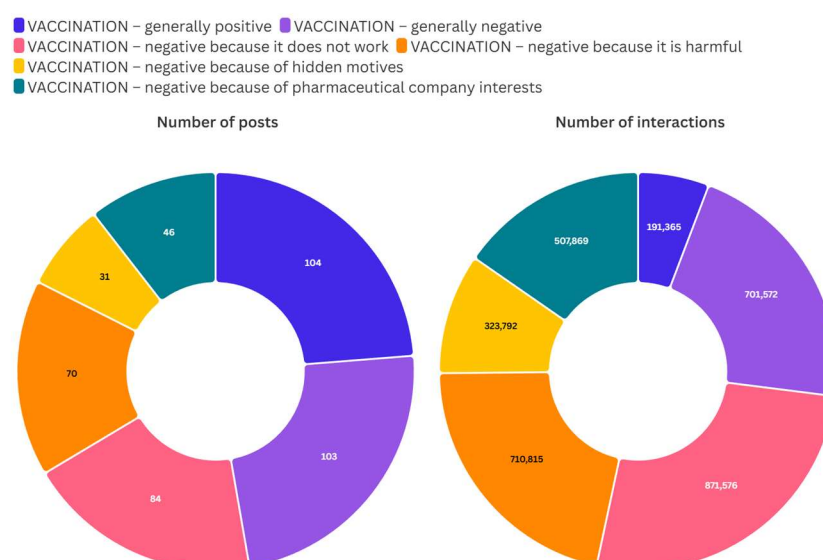
Graph 4, in combination with Graph 3, shows not only the frequency of occurrence of individual narratives, but also the degree of their social response, which can be perceived as an indicator of communication effectiveness. The results show that the narratives associated with anti-pandemic measures generated the most attention and interactions during the period under review, generating a total of more than 11.4 million interactions. Their dominance suggests that this topic became the main communication framework of the pandemic, through which political actors formulated their positions on the functioning of the state, individual freedom, and social responsibility. A high level of audience engagement was also recorded for narratives about testing (4.25 million interactions) and vaccination in general (3.3 million interactions), which were related to the everyday experience of citizens and were therefore particularly sensitive to emotional reactions. Vaccination in the context of the EMA (1.3 million interactions) and vaccination outside the EMA (575,000 interactions) also became significant factors in the discourse, confirming that the pandemic was also a space for the articulation of geopolitical and institutional preferences — between trust in European regulatory frameworks and sympathy for alternative sources of vaccines. On average, the highest interaction value per narrative case was achieved by the categories of vaccination with EMA certification (9,678 interactions per case on average) and treatment (9,463 interactions per case on average). These were followed by narratives about vaccination outside the EMA (8,719 interactions per case on average) and testing (8,206 interactions per case on average). These data confirm that topics related to personal experience, health risks, and individual decision-making mobilized the audience the most. In contrast, narratives about the origin of the virus (439 interactions per case on average) or its non-existence (1,396 interactions per case on average) remained marginal—their low frequency and response indicate a weaker influence of conspiracy frameworks in official political communication. In summary, it can be said that the narratives that achieved the highest level of social resonance were those that reflected the specific impact of the pandemic on the lives of individuals — whether in terms of measures, testing, or vaccination. These discursive frameworks created a space in which politics, science, and everyday experience intersected and through which political actors actively shaped the collective perception of the pandemic as a social and political phenomenon.



Graph 5: Number of posts and interactions by individual narratives about the nature of COVID-19

Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

Graph 5 displays a comparison of the number of posts and the total number of interactions within narratives that addressed the origin and nature of the virus. The data show that the most common theme of communication in this category was the narrative of COVID as a mild disease ($n = 80$ posts), which also generated the highest number of interactions (468,346). This narrative often appeared as a relativizing framework for the pandemic, in which political actors questioned the seriousness of the disease, appealed to the “normality” of life, and used it to criticize strict measures or vaccination. On the other hand, the narrative of COVID as a serious disease ($n = 26$ posts; 121,046 interactions) appeared less frequently in communication, suggesting that political representation was less often based on warnings or calls to action based on health threats. Narratives about the origin of the virus—whether in the form of claims about its artificial origin in the US or China, or about its escape from a laboratory—were equally infrequent. Their occurrence was marginal (a total of 14 posts), while the total number of interactions (approximately 266,000 in total) indicates that these topics resonated, but only with a limited audience. The narrative about COVID as a tool to restrict freedom also had a relatively low presence ($n = 5$ posts; 48,132 interactions), suggesting that within this category, polarizing topics were more associated with measures than with the nature of the disease itself. Narratives about COVID as a means of reducing the population were almost non-existent and their social impact was negligible.

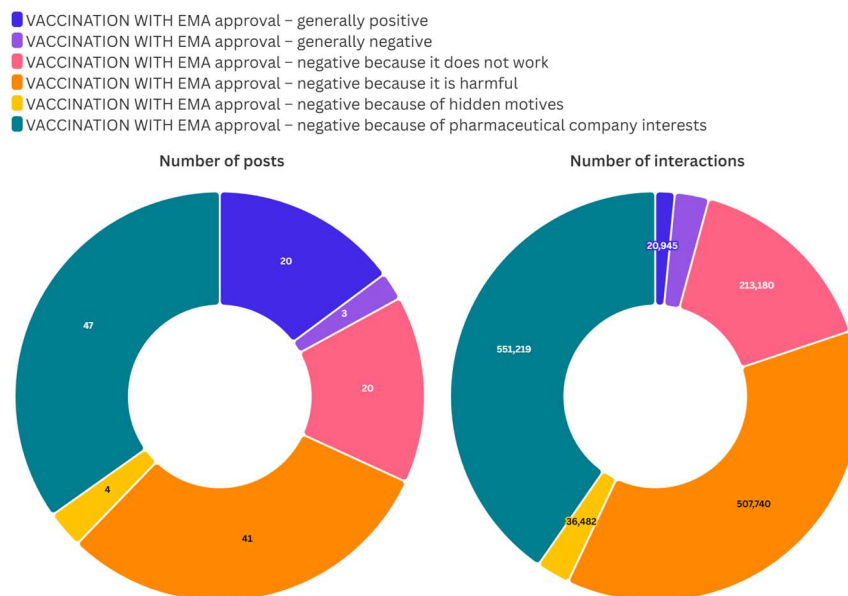


Graph 6: Number of posts and interactions by individual narratives about vaccination in general

Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

Graph 6 shows the distribution of the number of posts and the volume of interactions within narratives that focused on vaccination as such, regardless of the origin of the vaccines or their regulatory approval. The data show that the dominant theme of communication was a negative attitude toward vaccination, which appeared in various forms in the vast majority of the posts analyzed. Narratives of this type ($n = 334$) generated more than 3.1 million interactions, confirming their significant presence and social response. Generally negative communication about vaccination (without specific framing or reason) appeared in 103 cases, generating more than 700,000 interactions. The most common negative narratives in the communication questioned the effectiveness ($n = 84$; 877,576 interactions) or safety of vaccines ($n = 70$; 710,815 interactions). These narratives reflected persistent distrust of scientific authorities and were typical during periods of stricter measures or mandatory vaccination, when they served as a means of mobilizing resistance and political identity. Less frequent but thematically significant were narratives linking vaccination to ulterior motives ($n = 31$; 323,792 interactions) or the economic interests of pharmaceutical companies ($n = 46$; 507,689 interactions). These posts reinforced the idea of systemic manipulation or “pharmalobbying,” thereby expanding the anti-vaccination discourse with elements of distrust toward institutions and state authorities. In contrast, generally positive narratives about vaccination appeared only sporadically ($n = 104$; 191,365 interactions), suggesting that political communication was dominated by a critical to dismissive tone toward vaccination policy. From an interpretative perspective, it can be said that vaccination was one of the most polarizing topics of the pandemic. While professional institutions communicated it as a solution to the

health crisis, in the political arena it became a symbol of a broader debate about freedom, trust, and state power. The high number of interactions confirms that vaccination narratives functioned as carriers of identity and mobilization tools through which the public discourse on the legitimacy of pandemic policies was shaped.

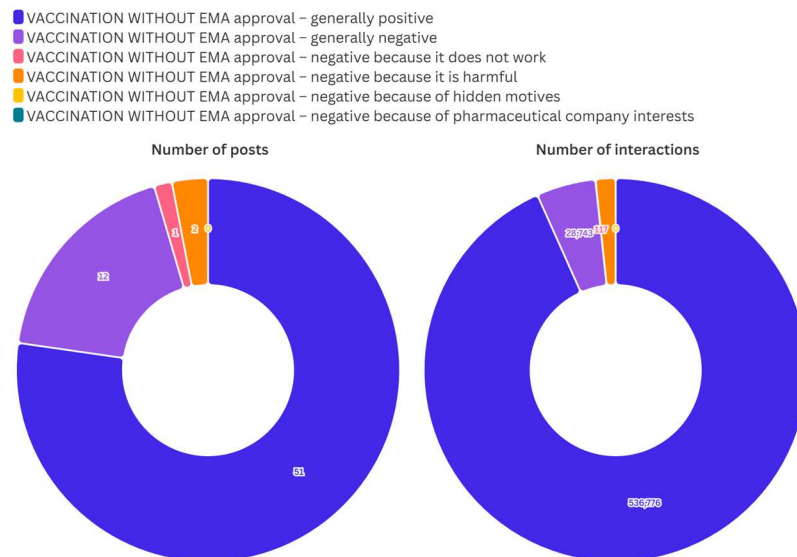


Graph 7: Number of posts and interactions by individual narratives about vaccination with EMA approval

Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

Graph 7 illustrates the distribution of posts and interactions within narratives focused on vaccines approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA). The data show that the communication of the monitored actors was predominantly negative in this case as well, with individual variations of this attitude taking different forms – from questioning the functionality of vaccines to constructing hidden agendas. A significant group consisted of posts presenting vaccination with EMA as ineffective ($n = 20$) or harmful ($n = 41$), which together generated over 720,000 interactions. These narratives reflected skepticism about the effectiveness of European vaccines, often framed in opposition to “alternative” vaccines outside the EMA’s approval. Narratives about the ulterior motives and economic interests of pharmaceutical companies ($n = 47$; 551,219 interactions in total) also received a strong response, reinforcing the idea of a link between the pharmaceutical industry and political decisions. Such interpretations were often used as a political argument against the government (or parts of it) or the EU, combining criticism of globalization, Western elites, and “Brussels diktats.” In contrast, generally positive narratives about vaccination with the EMA were only marginally represented ($n = 20$; 20,945 interactions), which corresponds to the overall trend of skepticism and questioning in the discourse on vaccination. Vaccination approved by the EMA thus

became a symbol of broader political and social tensions, in which health issues intersected with topics of trust in European institutions, sovereignty, and Slovakia's geopolitical orientation. The high level of interaction with negative narratives indicates that questioning the "European" legitimacy of vaccination was one of the most effective forms of political communication during the pandemic.

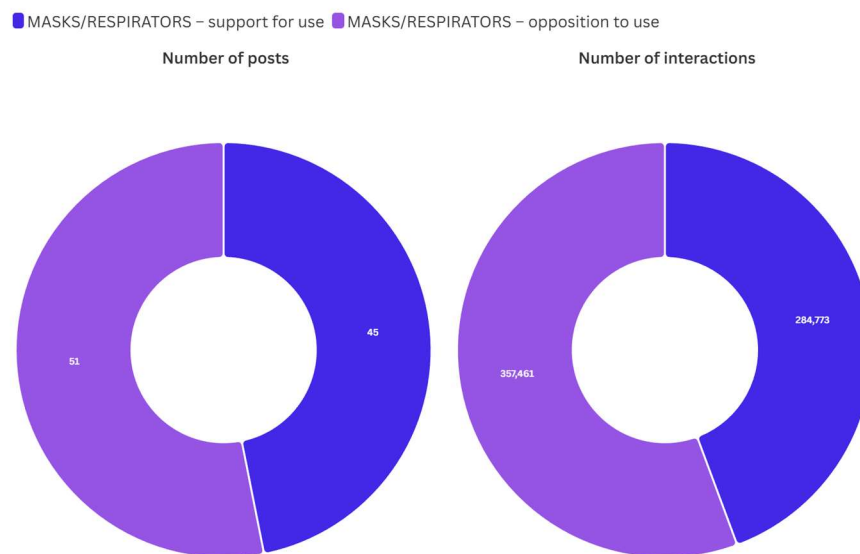


Graph 8: Number of posts and interactions by individual narratives about vaccination without EMA approval

Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

Graph 8 depicts the distribution of posts and interactions within narratives related to vaccination outside the EMA, i.e., vaccines that have not undergone the approval process of European institutions. The data clearly confirm the dominance of positive framing of this topic – posts highlighting vaccination outside the EMA as a suitable, effective, or sovereign alternative constituted the overwhelming majority of communication ($n = 51$) and generated up to 536,776 interactions. This narrative, which was particularly prominent in political communication during the import of the Sputnik V vaccine to Slovakia (March 2021), reflected the geopolitical dimension of the pandemic. Vaccination outside the EMA as a narrative enabled a shift from the health level to the political-identity level, where it served as a tool for criticizing Western institutions and strengthening the positive image of Russia and Eastern partners. Conversely, negative narratives—questioning the efficacy ($n = 1$; 117 interactions) or safety of vaccines outside the EMA ($n = 2$; 9,646 interactions)—appeared only marginally. Their low frequency and reach confirm that, compared to communication about "Western" vaccines, this topic was framed in a much more favorable light. At the same time, it appeared in a lower amount of content. For comparison, narratives about EMA-certified vaccines appeared in 135 cases. Those without it appeared in only 66 cases. The positive tone and high

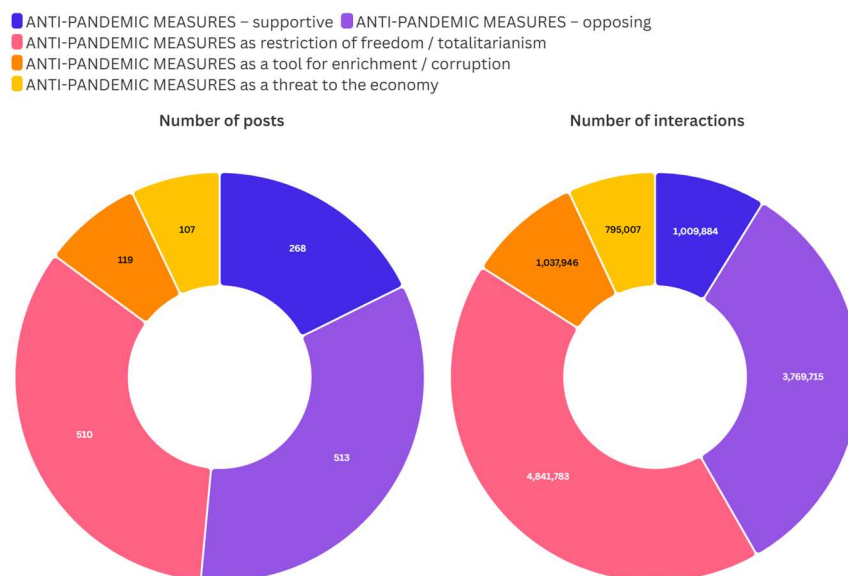
level of interaction show that this narrative was a very effective mobilizing element, capable of linking health issues with questions of geopolitical orientation.



Graph 9: Number of posts and interactions by individual narratives about masks and respirators

Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

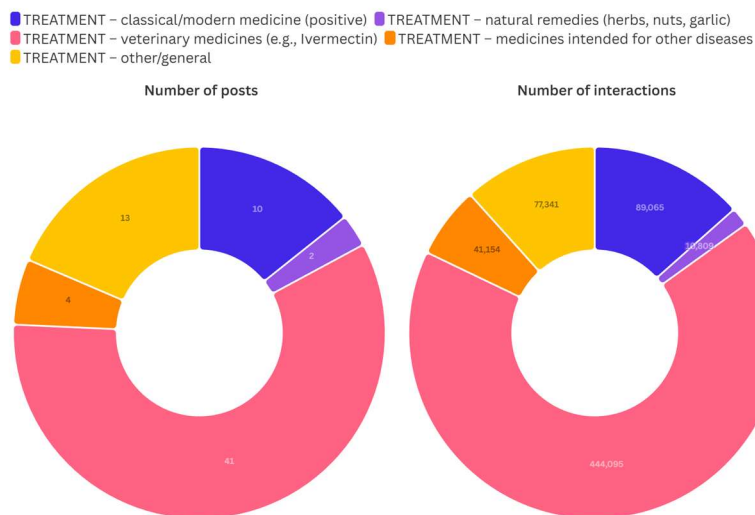
Graph 9 compares the number of posts and the amount of interaction within narratives that focused on the use of masks and respirators. The data show that communication in this area was evenly polarized—posts with positive sentiment ($n = 45$) and posts with negative sentiment ($n = 51$) appeared in approximately equal proportions. In terms of social response, positive narratives (284,778 interactions) generated only slightly fewer interactions than negative ones (357,461 interactions), indicating a high degree of polarization in the discourse. While supporters of masks perceived them as a responsible and solidarity-based tool for protecting health, opponents interpreted them as a tool of state control, an unnecessary restriction, or a symbol of coercion. In both cases, these were highly emotional frameworks that mobilized the audience not only on the basis of rational but also identity-based impulses. In terms of interpreting the results, it can be said that the topic of masks and respirators functioned as a microcosm of broader pandemic communication, as it allowed political actors to demonstrate their attitudes towards the state, authorities, and social solidarity. The mask thus became a visible sign of one's attitude towards the pandemic – both physical and political.



Graph 10: Number of posts and interactions by individual narratives on anti-pandemic measures

Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

Graph 10 shows the distribution of posts and interactions within narratives addressing anti-pandemic measures. It confirms that this category was one of the most prominent and most discussed areas of pandemic discourse. In terms of frequency, posts expressing general opposition to the measures ($n = 513$) or describing them as a restriction of freedom and a manifestation of totalitarianism ($n = 510$) dominated. These narratives together formed the core of opposition to pandemic policy and generated more than 8.6 million interactions. Their common feature was the framing of state interventions as disproportionate, authoritarian, or ineffective, often accompanied by appeals to civil liberty, the right to choose, and criticism of “government diktat.” In contrast, narratives supporting the measures ($n = 268$) achieved a relatively balanced number of posts, but lagged significantly in terms of interaction (1,009,884 interactions). This suggests that although the voice supporting the measures was present in the discourse, it failed to generate the same level of engagement as its opponents. Narratives about the measures as a tool for corruption or enrichment ($n = 119$; 1,037,946 interactions) and a threat to the economy ($n = 107$; 795,007 interactions) complemented the overall framework of criticism of the government, linking the topic of the pandemic with long-term distrust of institutions and political elites. From an interpretative point of view, it can be said that communication about anti-pandemic measures was the most significant source of polarization in the Slovak political debate on the pandemic. Negative narratives not only prevailed quantitatively, but also achieved a higher degree of effectiveness in terms of social response.

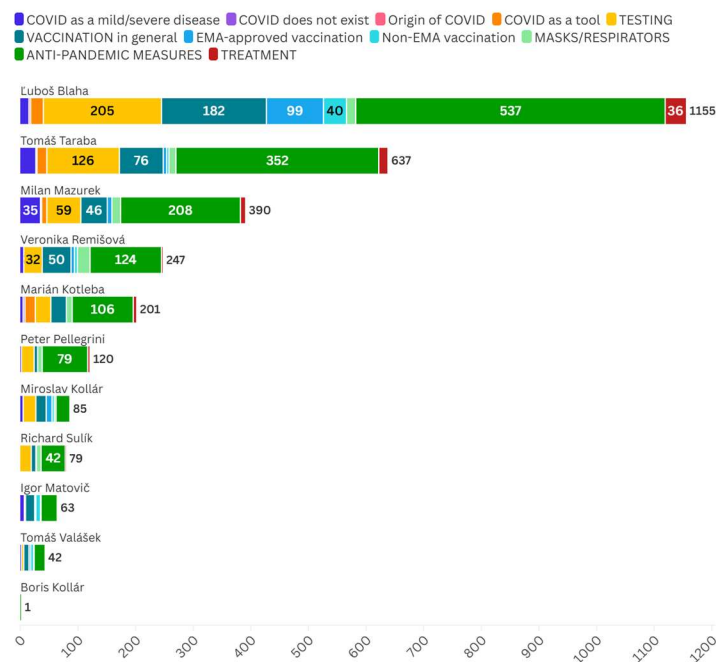


Graph 11: Number of posts and interactions by individual narratives about treatment
Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

Graph 11 demonstrates the distribution of posts and interactions within narratives that focused on COVID-19 treatment methods. The results show that this category was not among the most frequent. The largest share of communication was made up of narratives about treatment with veterinary drugs ($n = 41$; 444,095 interactions), which were mainly associated with media-known cases of the use of ivermectin or other unapproved substances. These narratives reflected distrust of official medicine and supported the idea that alternative medicines represent a “secret” or “prohibited” form of effective help. In contrast, positive narratives about conventional medicine and the scientific approach appeared only rarely ($n = 10$; 89,065 interactions). Their limited occurrence points to the weaker ability of political actors to effectively communicate trust in professional authorities and to the absence of a consistent scientific framework in the discourse. Natural treatments ($n = 2$; 10,809 interactions) and treatments with drugs intended for other diseases ($n = 4$; 41,154 interactions) appeared to a marginal extent. The category of other or general forms of treatment ($n = 13$; 77,361 interactions) was relatively strongly represented. These narratives were characterized by an effort to normalize an individual approach to coping with the pandemic outside of institutional recommendations. The discourse on COVID-19 treatment reflected a crisis of confidence in scientific and regulatory authorities. Political communication was dominated by narratives that questioned expert knowledge and offered alternative solutions instead.

After identifying the main thematic categories of narratives, an analysis focuses on the communication behavior of individual political actors. The aim of this section is to examine which actors were most intensively involved in the discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic, what narratives they used in their communication, and what response their content elicited from the public. The analysis tracks both the level of communication activity (number of published posts)

and the effectiveness of communication (number of interactions generated), allowing for a comparison of differences in the manner and impact of individual expressions of political communication. Particular attention is paid to the extent to which individual actors communicated in favor of or against anti-pandemic measures. This dimension is not limited to the category of “anti-pandemic measures” as such, but includes a broader framework of related topics—testing, vaccination (including a distinction between vaccines with and without EMA certification), wearing masks and respirators, and methods of treatment. The approach thus distinguishes between acceptance of the state’s official pandemic management procedure and rejection of it, which reflects a tendency toward alternative, often anti-system and anti-official attitudes. This contrast allows us to analyze how individual political actors approached crisis management and how their communication contributed to the formation of a polarized social discourse.

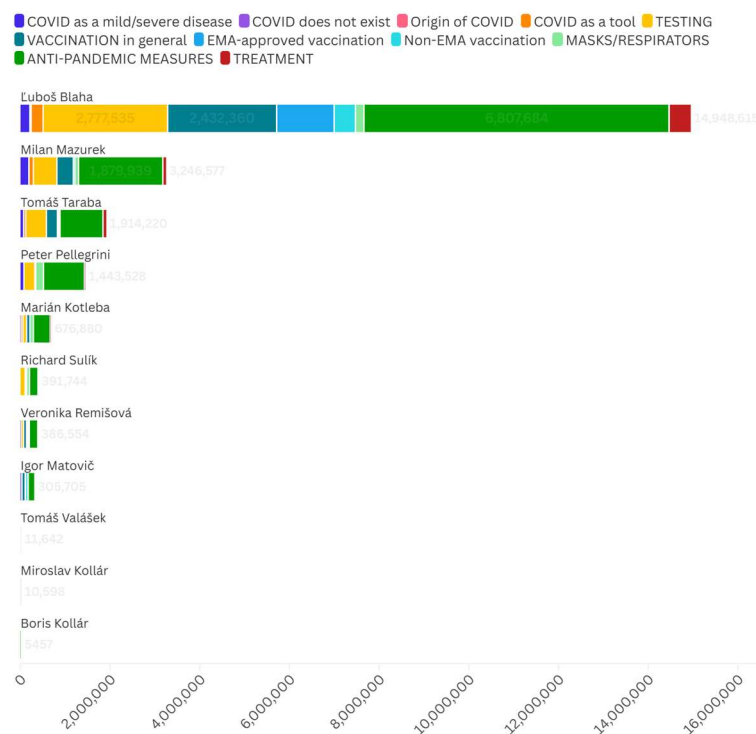


Graph 12: Number of narrative cases by group in the political communication of monitored actors

Source: Authors’ work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

Graph 12 illustrates the distribution of narrative types used by individual political representatives in their communication about the COVID-19 pandemic. The results show significant differences in the thematic orientation and framing of the pandemic among the actors monitored. The most extensive and diverse communication footprint was left by Luboš Blaha, who addressed almost all categories of narratives. The theme of anti-pandemic measures dominated his communication (537 posts), often accompanied by critical assessments and an emphasis on their alleged negative impacts on freedom and society.

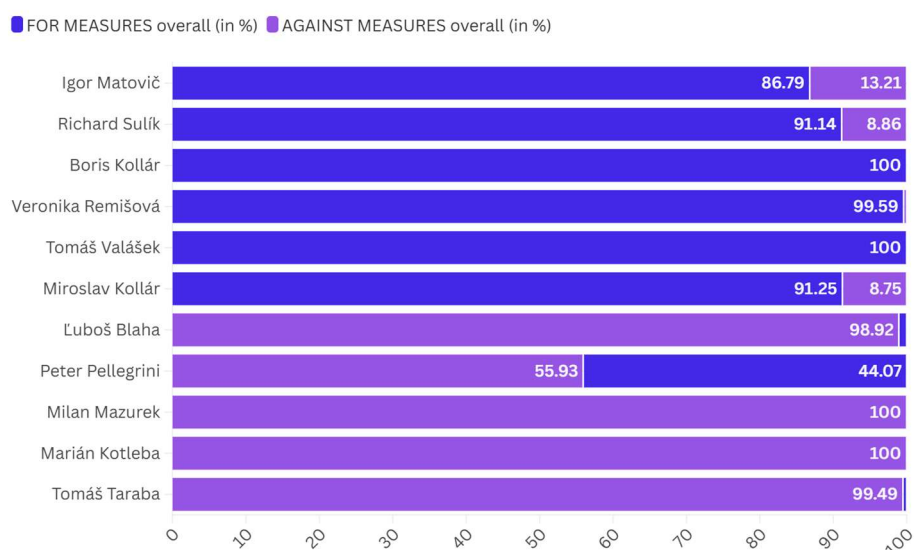
Narratives about testing (205), vaccination (182), and specifically vaccination with EMA certification (99) were also prominent, pointing to a systematic effort to create an alternative framework for interpreting the pandemic in which institutional responses are questioned. Tomáš Taraba similarly profiled himself as one of the main proponents of critical narratives, especially in the categories of anti-pandemic measures (352 posts) and testing (126). His high level of activity in these areas suggests that the pandemic was an important part of his media strategy, often using narratives with elements of skepticism towards official institutions and measures. In terms of the total number of posts, Milan Mazurek was also very active, emphasizing anti-pandemic measures (208) and testing (59) in his posts. His communication was among the most prominent in the context of anti-government and confrontational discourse, contributing to the polarization of public debate. His communication also featured narratives questioning the seriousness of the pandemic (35). At the opposite end of the spectrum is Veronika Remišová, whose communication was more evenly distributed—she devoted less attention to anti-pandemic measures (124 posts), but more often from a defensive or explanatory framework, indicating an effort to rationalize crisis management. In terms of narrative diversity, it can be said that most actors focused on a limited number of topics, indicating a targeted communication strategy and selective use of narratives with the greatest mobilization potential.



Graph 13: Number of interactions by narrative according to groups in the political communication of monitored actors

Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

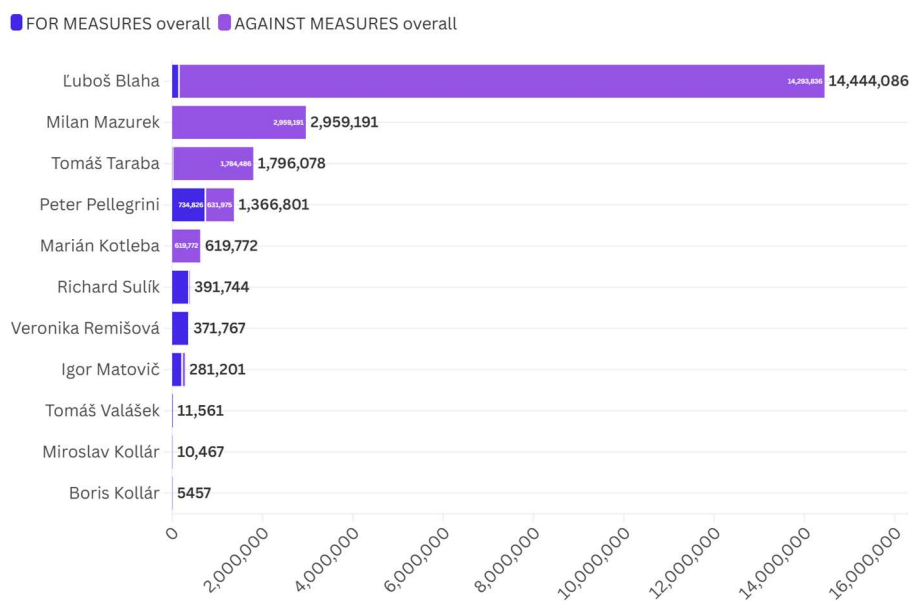
Graph 13 shows how individual narratives resonated among Facebook users, i.e., the level of interaction—reactions, comments, and shares—they generated in connection with the communication of specific political figures. The data show that Ľuboš Blaha was clearly the most effective communicator on the topic of the pandemic during the period under review. His posts generated a total of more than 14.9 million interactions, which is several times more than any other actor. The narratives about anti-pandemic measures (6.8 million interactions) received the greatest response, which Blaha often framed as a restriction of freedom, a manifestation of totalitarianism, or manipulation by the state. Narratives about testing (2.77 million) and vaccination in general (2.43 million) also resonated strongly, which were predominantly negative in his communication and associated with criticism of “pharmaceutical interests” or “coercive state systems.” Milan Mazurek ranked second in overall reach, with his posts receiving 3.25 million interactions. His communication focused primarily on criticism of anti-pandemic measures (1.87 million), testing (more than 524,000), and vaccination (approximately 366,000), confirming the high mobilization potential of these topics in the context of anti-system communication. Tomáš Taraba follows with more than 1.9 million interactions, and like Blaha and Mazurek, he benefited from narratives questioning the effectiveness or legitimacy of the measures. His communication style combined the rhetoric of civil resistance with an effort to politically evaluate the topic, which allowed him to maintain a high level of audience engagement. Other relevant, albeit less effective, actors include Peter Pellegrini (1.44 million), Marian Kotleba (676,000), and Richard Sulík (391,000). Their communication had a lower level of interaction but was thematically consistent. At the opposite end of the spectrum are actors such as Veronika Remišová, Igor Matovič, and Tomáš Valášek, whose communication did address the pandemic but with significantly lower response rates (ranging from 390,000 to 10,000 interactions). This trend suggests that critical and polarizing narratives had a much greater impact in the online environment than neutral or pro-government communication frameworks. Political communication about the pandemic on social networks became a highly asymmetrical space dominated by critical, emotionally charged rhetoric at the expense of factual and reassuring discourse.



Graph 14: Percentage ratio of narratives in the political communication of monitored actors. For measures vs. against measures

Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

The graph shows the extent to which individual political actors leaned toward supporting or rejecting anti-pandemic measures in their communication on Facebook, taking into account all topics related to the pandemic—testing, vaccination (including EMA and non-EMA), masks and respirators, anti-pandemic measures, and treatment. The results show a clear division of the actors monitored into two main groups: those who communicated mainly in favor of official measures and those whose communication was explicitly negative. On the side supporting the measures, the most prominent were Boris Kollár, Tomáš Valášek, Veronika Remišová, Richard Sulík, and Miroslav Kollár, whose communication was largely (91–100%) in line with the official pandemic management framework. Their contributions often reflected an emphasis on responsibility, social solidarity, and rational crisis management. Igor Matovič (86.79% “FOR”) is a specific case—although his communication initially supported government measures, it was characterized by a confrontational and polarizing style that could have undermined confidence in the messages themselves. At the opposite end of the spectrum are actors whose communication was almost exclusively against anti-pandemic measures. Among them are Tomáš Taraba, Marian Kotleba, Milan Mazurek, and Ľuboš Blaha, who in 98–100% of their posts used narratives questioning the official state strategy, described the measures as disproportionate or totalitarian, and often referred to “alternative” sources of solutions, such as unlicensed vaccines or unproven treatments. These actors used the pandemic as a tool for political mobilization and polarization, building on emotions and distrust of the authorities. An interesting case is Peter Pellegrini, whose communication was balanced (55.93% “FOR,” 44.07% “AGAINST”). This ratio indicates a pragmatic approach—an effort to appear moderate, maintain credibility in the eyes of a broad spectrum of voters, and avoid open polarization.



Graph 15: Number of interactions in political communication by monitored actors. For measures vs. against measures

Source: Authors' work. Data obtained from Gerulata Juno and CrowdTangle

The graph illustrates the response to posts by individual political actors according to their value framework—that is, whether they supported or questioned anti-pandemic measures and broader government responses to the pandemic. The data show a clear dominance of critical (“AGAINST”) narratives, which generated a significantly higher level of interaction than supportive posts. The most striking example is L'uboš Blaha, whose communications generated a total of more than 14.4 million interactions, almost all of which came from content rejecting pandemic measures. This extreme imbalance points to an extraordinary ability to mobilize audiences through emotional, polarizing, and often confrontational narratives that achieve high viral potential in the online environment. A similar trend can be observed with Milan Mazurek (2.95 million interactions) and Tomáš Taraba (1.79 million interactions), whose communication was almost exclusively in opposition to official measures. Both can be classified among the most successful disseminators of critical narratives, who were able to effectively mobilize their supporters through social networks and create an anti-government framework for interpreting the pandemic. Peter Pellegrini occupies a special place, whose posts (1.36 million interactions) were more balanced in terms of topic—approximately half of his communication was moderate or supportive in nature, which is also reflected in his balanced position between the “FOR” and “AGAINST” camps. His communication style suggests an effort to maintain credibility with a wider audience, without stronger ideological distinctions. On the other hand, representatives with predominantly supportive communication – Veronika Remišová (371,000 interactions), Richard Sulík (391,000), and Igor Matovič (281,000) – achieved significantly lower effectiveness. Although their posts were factual and

rational in nature, in an environment of highly polarized discourse, they generated less response than content based on criticism and conflict. Overall, the results confirm that in the online environment, communication “against the measures” had a significantly higher mobilizing effect than posts appealing to responsibility or trust in institutions. This trend corresponds to the broader phenomenon of political communication during crises, where emotionally charged and oppositional narratives achieve greater audience engagement than rational and moderate forms of discourse.

4 Discussion

The results of this study clearly show that social networks – especially Facebook – played a crucial role in political communication during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovakia. The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the way political actors interacted with the public, with social networks becoming the primary communication channel, especially for rapid and strategy-oriented communication. Social platforms, especially Facebook, enabled politicians to immediately inform the public about measures, build trust, and mobilize support, but also to polarize and spread conflicting narratives. There has been a significant shift in discourse towards personalization, with leaders playing a prominent role and new political entities with innovative approaches becoming active. The research confirmed that Slovak political actors made intensive use of social media not only to communicate about the pandemic, but also to polarize society, build their own legitimacy, and spread or refute disinformation.

The findings correspond with research published in international literature, according to which crisis communication by politicians on social networks is characterized by speed, personalization, and often dramatization of events. At the same time, the low credibility of social networks as a source of information, which has also been identified in previous domestic and foreign studies, is confirmed. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the spread of conspiracies and hoaxes, in which actors played the role of a so-called “megaphone” for disinformation. Disinformation and conspiracy theories were widely accepted and disseminated by the public, with well-known personalities constituting a minority of sources but generating a significant amount of disinformation. The study confirmed the existence of an “infodemic” – an excessive amount of information, not all of which was accurate. The study confirmed the existence of an “infodemic” – an excessive amount of information, not all of which was accurate. The massive increase in the use of the internet and online media in Slovakia led to increased consumption of news, but also caused problems with finding reliable sources.

The pandemic provided an opportunity to reinforce populist discourse; political leaders—especially from the opposition—often used the crisis to criticize the government’s management and dramatize the situation. Such discourse reinforced the polarization of society and spectacularized the failures of scientific and institutional capacities. Populism was identified in the research in narratives dividing society into antagonistic groups, which led to a further deepening of tensions.

It turned out that narratives related to anti-pandemic measures, vaccination, and testing dominated the thematic spectrum, generating the highest number of posts and interactions. These areas also showed the highest level of controversy, as they brought together attitudes supporting institutional crisis management with skeptical or openly dismissive attitudes. In terms of interactions, the most successful narratives were those that questioned the legitimacy of the measures or presented them as a restriction of personal freedom.

In terms of actors, it was confirmed that the highest level of communication activity and effectiveness was achieved by representatives associated with the then opposition or anti-system attitudes, especially Ľuboš Blaha, Milan Mazurek, and Tomáš Taraba. Their posts made up a significant part of the overall discourse on the pandemic and were characterized by a high number of interactions, which shows their ability to reach audiences through simple, confrontational, and mobilizing narratives. These patterns are in line with theories of populist communication and crisis exploitation, which argue that populist and anti-system actors tend to reframe technocratic or health-related issues into moral conflicts between “the people” and “the elites”. By amplifying narratives that question the legitimacy and proportionality of anti-pandemic measures, Slovak opposition and fringe actors used Facebook to contest expert authority and government competence, reinforcing polarization in a context of fragile institutional trust. On the contrary, actors with predominantly supportive communication—such as Igor Matovič, Veronika Remišová, and Richard Sulík—remained within the official framework of the pandemic in terms of subject matter, but their posts had a significantly lower reach and audience engagement.

An analysis of the ratio between communication “FOR” and “AGAINST” anti-pandemic measures confirmed a clear trend: critical, dismissive, and polarizing rhetoric clearly prevailed in the online environment, generating higher interactivity. This confirms the well-known dynamics of social networks, where emotional and conflictual content generates more attention than facts or moderate statements.

Research has shown that a high level of interaction—i.e., comments, shares, and likes—is a significant indicator of reach. From a practical point of view, however, it is important to realize that a high number of interactions does not automatically mean greater qualitative impact on public opinion, which is in line with the recommendations of methodological approaches in the social sciences. Crisis communication was marked by insufficient content

regulation by Facebook, which allowed the spread of false information without emphasis on fact-checking.

A comparison with foreign research shows that the Slovak situation had specific characteristics—high fragmentation of the political scene, increased personalization, and a significant shift of discourse to the online space. This trend is in line with global changes in political communication, but its impact in Slovakia was amplified by the pandemic and concurrent social crises.

The COVID-19 pandemic in Slovakia significantly accentuated the importance of Facebook and other social networks as tools not only for informing citizens, but also for political struggle, polarization, and the dissemination or refutation of disinformation. The study enriches this issue and existing research on political communication during crises on three interconnected levels. From a theoretical perspective, it advances the narrative approach to crisis communication by empirically demonstrating how political narratives may not only function as frames of interpretation, but also as mobilizing tools that intensify polarization, particularly in contexts marked by low institutional trust. Methodologically, the study combines qualitative narrative analysis with quantitative measures of communication effectiveness, operationalized through interaction metrics. The systematic categorization of narratives and the integration of frequency and engagement data provide a replicable approach for analyzing large-scale social media datasets. Empirically, the study documents how opposition and anti-system actors disproportionately shaped the online discourse through emotionally charged and confrontational narratives, which proved significantly more effective in generating user engagement than pro-government or expert-oriented communication. These findings enrich the literature on crisis communication by offering evidence from a Central European case and highlighting the structural vulnerabilities of digital public spheres during crisis situations.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the need for crisis communication strategies that explicitly anticipate politicized narratives on social media and respond to their emotional and identity-based appeal. Public authorities and fact-checking initiatives should complement factual corrections with communication that addresses fears about freedom, control and institutional failure. Future research could extend this approach through comparative designs across crises, platforms or countries, and by combining narrative analysis with survey data on attitudes and trust.

Conclusion

The analysis showed that the highest level of communication activity and interaction was achieved by opposition figures or regular critics of the political system. Their communication often contained elements of populism, simplification of complex issues, and

appealed to voters' emotions. Government representatives, on the other hand, were less intense in their communication, and their messages were predominantly informational and defensive in nature. During the pandemic, political actors who were able to respond more quickly to the mood of the audience, worked with emotions, and were able to adapt their rhetoric to the logic of the digital environment gained the upper hand in the Slovak online space.

Among the narratives monitored, those related to anti-pandemic measures, vaccination, and testing were the most prominent in terms of both the number of posts and the number of interactions. Other narratives monitored, such as those related to the origin of the disease or its treatment, were less prominent. We can therefore conclude that narratives related to the personal experiences of citizens dominated. Critical and negative attitudes prevailed in all monitored categories. A limitation of this study is its focus on Facebook communication and publicly available posts by political actors, which means that it may not cover the entire breadth of political discourse or informal communication with voters on other platforms. Future research could extend the analysis to other social networks, including visual and video content, and also pay attention to the reception of narratives by different types of audiences. There is also potential for analyzing the effectiveness of specific anti-pandemic communications among different age and socio-economic groups in the longer term.

Based on the analysis of political narratives on social networks during the COVID-19 pandemic, the creation and implementation of crisis communication in the context of public policy should be conceived as a transparent and consistent process. Providing clear and timely information to the public reduces uncertainty and helps build trust in state institutions. Effective communication also requires systematic cooperation with expert institutions and independent fact-checkers, which improves the quality of public debate and reduces the risk of spreading misinformation or conspiracy theories in times of crisis. The results suggest that, in order to promote the relevance and cultivation of public discourse, it would also be appropriate to establish rules for communication by political actors on social networks with the aim of limiting the spread of controversial or manipulative content and contributing to strengthening the accountability of public actors in the online space.

Moreover, the study's findings underscore that a key prerequisite for an effective societal response to such crises is media literacy among citizens, including the ability to critically process news from social media. Increasing media literacy is an essential part of preventing the spread of disinformation and promoting the mental well-being of the population in times of information overload. In this area, we also recommend legislative and self-regulatory measures targeting large platforms, which should make clear commitments to limiting harmful and misleading content.

Taken together, the findings contribute to broader debates on political communication, populism and disinformation. They show how health-related crises can be reframed into conflicts over freedom, trust and institutional legitimacy, and how opposition and anti-system actors exploit Facebook's affordances for emotional, conflict-driven framing. The study also demonstrates that integrating narrative categories with sentiment and engagement indicators is a useful strategy for future research on digital politics and hybrid information threats.

These outcomes can serve as a starting point for formulating public communication strategies in future crisis periods. In this context, it is worth noting that communication by coalition actors supporting anti-pandemic measures proved to be less effective. The obvious explanation is that on social networks, the negative views presented by opposition actors had a greater impact because their authors emphasized emotion. Opposition actors had a greater impact mainly because they spread their messages in an environment that is not sufficiently regulated and in which disinformation or polarizing narratives spread faster than official messages. These findings open up a discussion about effective crisis communication, which should also include the issue of social media administrators' responsibility for content regulation and support for fact-checking tools. The results of the study thus also highlight the broader social importance of critical thinking and media literacy, not only during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also in other times of crisis.

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Local Government in Ukraine

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Abstract

The topicality of this issue is conditioned by the ongoing processes of constitutional reform of the territorial organization of public power, while local self-government is becoming a key factor in the development of Ukrainian statehood. In the context of Ukraine, the processes of democratization and modernization of the state consist mainly in finding an adequate balance between centralization and decentralization tendencies. The success of these processes directly depends on the efficiency of the exercise of public power, the optimality of the systemic and structural organization, as well as on adequate methods and forms of the implementation of power at various administrative levels. The key factor is also the optimal distribution of powers between state and local government bodies, which is related to the effective redistribution of substantial and financial resources.

Keywords: self-government, control, law, legislation, competences

Introduction

In every state, local self-government is characterized by a distinct form and designation, and these features are independent of the political-administrative structure, form of government, historical circumstances, or national and cultural specificities (Yarmish, Seryogin 2002). According to Sergeyeva (2017), local self-government in every country of the world is grounded in the principles of national theories of self-governance. The most widespread among them is the communal (community-based) theory, which is recognized by the majority of European states. The communal theory is based on the concept of the natural rights of the territorial community, its specific “sovereignty,” and the principles of decentralized governance (Kondratska 2015). At the same time, it emphasizes the financial and organizational autonomy of local self-government units.

The emergence and development of local self-government are conditioned by society's understanding that state power concentrated in the center cannot effectively address matters of local significance, nor adequately reflect local interests, needs, and the conditions essential for supporting community life (Boryslavskaya 2011). These issues must be resolved at the local level. According to Melnyk (2009), local self-government represents a fundamental pillar of the democratic structure of the state, enabling citizens to participate actively in the management of local affairs. Its organization, functioning, and relationships with other tiers of

government are regulated by administrative and legal norms. This article analyzes the key aspects of local self-government, including its legal framework, structure, competences, and control mechanisms.

The existing model of the systemic and structural arrangement of local self-government was originally conceived as transitional and no longer fulfills its intended function. This model has become an obstacle not only to the further development of local self-government, but also to the broader context of territorial development of the country (Batanov 2008). The continued advancement of local self-government in Ukraine requires an essential revision of its legal regulation at both the constitutional and legislative levels, necessitating the development of an appropriate doctrinal framework to support these changes (Rusnák 2011).

A Systems Approach to Local Self-Government

Local self-government is understood as a system that integrates various objects and phenomena into a new, complex whole whose properties exceed the mere sum of its parts. This system comprises two fundamental dimensions:

1. The system of forms of local self-government – the modes through which local self-government is exercised.
2. The system of subjects of local self-government – the institutions and bodies that perform local self-government (Kondratska 2015).
3. Core Characteristics of Local Self-Government as a System (Kondratska 2020)
4. Integrity – local self-government functions as a unified whole within defined territorial boundaries.
5. Hierarchy – it encompasses subsystems at various levels of administrative–territorial organization, with local self-government representing a subsystem of public authority alongside the state and autonomous entities.
6. Holism – the whole possesses properties that surpass the capabilities of its individual components.
7. Structural implementation – the system is composed of interconnected elements and subsystems that cooperate to achieve common objectives.
8. Readiness/Responsiveness – individual subsystems may have differing objectives, yet local self-government as a whole demonstrates new qualitative characteristics.
9. Homeostasis – the capacity to maintain stable functioning within legal frameworks and in the face of contemporary challenges.
10. Synergy – cooperation among system elements enhances overall efficiency and strengthens outcomes.
11. Integrability – the individual elements of the system are linked into a coherent functional unit.

12. Communicativeness – the system responds to its historical environment and adapts to external changes.
13. Multiplicativity – the effects of local self-government can multiply, whether positively or negatively.
14. Historicity – the system evolves over time in response to internal and external factors.
15. Effectiveness – local self-government contributes to the resolution of tasks in the interest of the community and to the efficient use of community resources (Kondratska 2020).

Hybrid Nature of Contemporary Local Self-Government

Recent theoretical perspectives characterize local self-government as a hybrid system, functioning simultaneously as:

- A subsystem of public authority – performing delegated powers and cooperating with state institutions.
- A subsystem of civil society – representing the interests of the local community and its actors (Kondratska 2017).

This hybrid nature encompasses the diffusion of powers between the state and local self-government through the institution of delegated competences. Key changes include:

1. Eliminating the overlap of state and local self-government competences at district and regional levels, while maintaining state oversight of the legality of local government activities (Naumova 2017).
2. Abolishing local state administrations, with their competences transferred to the executive committees of regional and district councils.
3. Emphasizing subsidiarity, shifting primary decision-making to the basic level—local communities (Kondratska 2015).
4. These measures are aimed at strengthening the autonomy of local self-government and enhancing its operational effectiveness.

1 The legal basis of local self-government

Local self-government in Ukraine is vested with the right of a territorial community to independently resolve matters of local significance within the limits of the Constitution and laws of Ukraine. Local self-government represents a form of public authority exercised by specific subjects—territorial communities and the bodies they establish. These bodies possess a distinct object of competence—matters of local significance—and operate on the basis of a distinct type of public (communal) property (Kondratska 2015). Local self-government is exercised by communities directly and through village, settlement, and city councils and their

executive bodies, as well as through district and regional councils that represent the common interests of territorial communities forming the respective districts and regions (Melnik 2009).

The principal provisions governing the organization and functioning of local self-government in Ukraine are defined by:

- Law No. 254к/96-VR, the Constitution of Ukraine, which in Articles 140–146 establishes the principles of local self-government (hereinafter “the Constitution of Ukraine”).
- Law No. 280/97-VR “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine” (1997) – the core legislative act regulating the activities of local self-government bodies, defining their powers and the procedures for their formation and operation (hereinafter “the Law on Local Self-Government in Ukraine”).
- Law No. 595-VIII “On Elections of Deputies of Local Councils and Heads of Villages, Settlements, Cities, and Regions” (2022) (hereinafter “the Law on Elections of Local Councils and Heads of Local Communities”).
- Law No. 2493-III “On Service in Local Self-Government Bodies” (2021) (hereinafter “the Law on Service in Local Self-Government Bodies”).
- The European Charter of Local Self-Government (1985) (ratified in 1997) – the most significant multilateral instrument establishing the fundamental principles governing the functioning of local authorities and their relationship with public authority. Its main objective is to guarantee and protect the rights of local self-government bodies, which are closest to citizens, and to enable their participation in decisions affecting everyday life.

The Constitution of Ukraine, as the legal foundation of local self-government, consolidates the system of local self-government and its financial and material base (Boryslavska 2011). It establishes the role of the territorial community and provides state-backed financial guarantees for local self-government (Batanov 2008). It also defines local self-government as a guarantor of citizens’ rights and freedoms (Bordenyuk 2011). Pursuant to Article 140 of the Constitution of Ukraine, local self-government encompasses the right of a territorial community—comprising residents of a village, settlement, city, or an association of multiple communities—to independently resolve matters of local significance in accordance with the Constitution and laws of Ukraine.

The Law of Ukraine “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine” regulates organizational matters related to the activities and powers of local self-government bodies. According to Bordenyuk (2011), the law affirms that local self-government in Ukraine constitutes a guaranteed right and a real capability of the territorial community to address local matters within the state’s constitutional and legislative framework.

The main features of local self-government in Ukraine include:

- Local self-government operates on democratic principles, enabling citizens to participate in the management of local affairs (Sergeyeva 2017).
- Local self-government exists at all levels of the administrative–territorial structure of the state (Rusnák 2011).
- The principle of separation of powers is not applied within the local self-government system; instead, a unified system of representative and executive bodies exists (Kondratska 2015).
- Local self-government has a clearly defined legal status within the Ukrainian legal system (Boryslavska 2011).

Principles of Local Self-Government

Local self-government rests upon a set of principles that shape its legal and organizational framework and ensure its functioning within the broader state and legal system (Melnik 2009).

1.The Principle of Democracy defines the mode of exercising public authority within local communities. It ensures that territorial communities possess the right to exercise their authority directly (for example through local referendums, elections, and citizens' initiatives), as well as through representative bodies such as city and village councils and their heads (Yarmish, Seryogin 2002).

2.The Principle of Legality requires that the activities of local self-government be grounded in the Constitution, applicable laws, and subordinate legislation. This principle guarantees the legal legitimacy of all decisions and measures adopted by local self-government bodies (Batanov 2008).

3.The Principle of Transparency (Publicity) means that the activities of local authorities must be open and accessible to the public. Local self-government bodies are obliged to perform their functions in a manner that is accessible to citizens, with their decisions and actions subject to coverage by local media and open public oversight (Kondratska 2015).

4.The Principle of Collegiality concerns the organizational and decision-making processes within local self-government, which are based on collective deliberation and decision-making in representative bodies, where decisions are adopted jointly (Yarmish, Seryogin 2002).

5.The Principle of Harmonization of Local and State Interests ensure cooperation between local self-government and central state authorities, including the delegation of certain powers and competences between the state and local authorities. This principle reflects the necessity of synchronizing interests across various levels of governance (Boryslavska 2011).

6.The Principle of Election establishes that key representatives of local self-government—such as deputies of local councils and heads of villages, settlements, and cities—are elected directly by citizens, thereby ensuring a democratic mandate and the legitimacy of these bodies (Melnik 2009).

7.The Principle of Legal, Organizational, Material, and Financial Autonomy is fundamental to the effective functioning of local self-government:

- Legal autonomy signifies that local self-government bodies exercise their powers within the legal norms assigned to them, with full discretion in decision-making.
- Organizational autonomy grants local bodies flexibility to determine their internal structure and modes of operation.
- Financial and material autonomy reflects the right of local governments to manage their financial resources and property for the purpose of performing their functions and responsibilities (Sergeyeva 2017).

8.The Principle of Accountability presumes that the activities of local self-government bodies are subject to public scrutiny by citizens. This mechanism ensures that decision-making processes remain transparent and responsive to the needs and expectations of local communities (Bordenyuk 2011).

9.The Principle of State Support and Guarantees ensures that the state provides local self-government bodies with financial and material assistance, as well as guarantees of legal protection through judicial mechanisms, thereby strengthening the stability and effectiveness of local governance (Batanov 2008).

2 System of local self-government

Historical Development of Local Self-Government Models in Ukraine throughout the period of Ukraine's independence, several models of local public authority have been applied:

1. The Soviet Model – a centralized system of direct state administration at the local level.
2. The Decentralized “Anglo-American” Model – a model aimed at full decentralization in which the functions of state administration are transferred to the executive bodies of local self-government (Kondratska 2017).

Table 1: Administrative Division of Ukraine

Capital City: Kyiv	
Regions (Oblasti) and Their Administrative Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cherkasy Oblast (Cherkasy) •Chernihiv Oblast (Chernihiv) •Chernivtsi Oblast (Chernivtsi) •Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (Dnipro) •Donetsk Oblast (Donetsk) •Kharkiv Oblast (Kharkiv) •Kherson Oblast (Kherson) •Khmelnyskyi Oblast (Khmelnyskyi) •Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast (Ivano-Frankivsk) •Kirovohrad Oblast (Kropyvnytskyi) •Kyiv Oblast (Kyiv) •Luhansk Oblast (Luhansk) •Lviv Oblast (Lviv) •Mykolaiv Oblast (Mykolaiv) •Odesa Oblast (Odesa) •Poltava Oblast (Poltava) •Rivne Oblast (Rivne) •Sumy Oblast (Sumy) •Ternopil Oblast (Ternopil) •Vinnytsia Oblast (Vinnytsia) •Volyn Oblast (Luts'k) •Zakarpattia Oblast (Uzhhorod) •Zaporizhzhia Oblast (Zaporizhzhia) • Zhytomyr Oblast (Zhytomyr)
Cities with Special Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Kyiv •Sevastopol
Autonomous Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomous Republic of Crimea

Source: Author's processing based on data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine

Table 2: Administrative Division of Ukraine

Administrative Unit	Number
Cities	461
Urban-type settlements	885
Rural areas and villages	approx. 28 000
District administrative units (raions)	490

Source: Author's processing based on data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine

The system of local self-government includes various levels and organizational structures that enable decentralized governance throughout the territory of the state (Melnik 2009):

- Primary level – basic units of local self-government: villages, rural areas, towns, and cities.
- Secondary level – higher territorial units: districts (raions) and regions (oblasts).
- Elements of the System of Local Self-Government (According to Article 5 of the Law “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine”)

- Territorial communities
- Councils of villages, rural areas, towns, cities, districts, and regions
- Heads of villages, rural areas, towns, cities, districts, and regions
- Executive bodies of village, rural, town, city, district, and regional councils
- District and regional councils.

Bodies of self-organization of the population

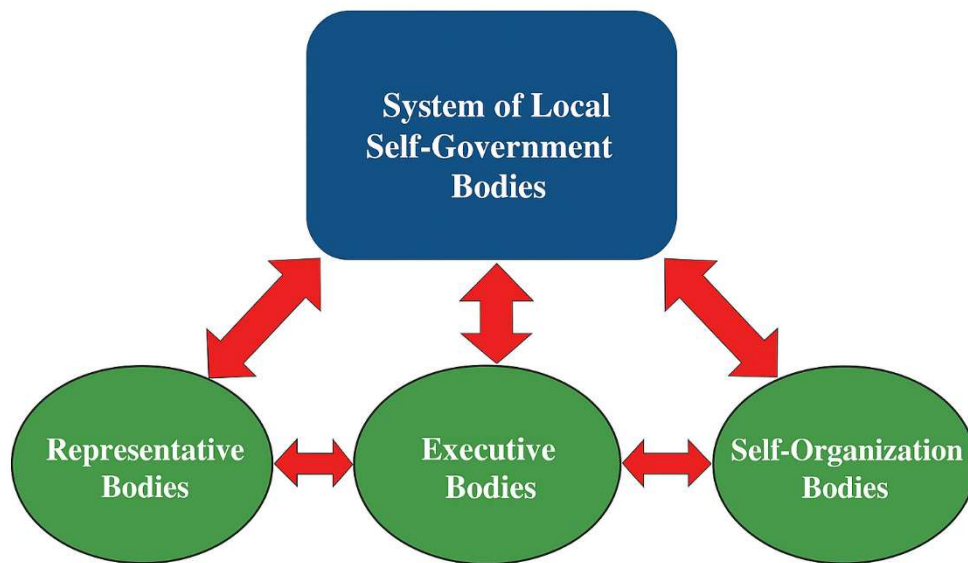


Figure 1: System of Local Self-Government Bodies

Source: Author's compilation based on the Law No. 280/97-VR "On Local Self-Government in Ukraine" (1997)

Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/280/97-bp#Text>

Representative bodies of local self-government ensure the legislative (decision-making) function at the local level. They decide on key matters related to territorial development and the management of local resources (Kondratska 2015).

- Executive bodies of local self-government implement the decisions adopted by representative bodies and carry out everyday administration and management (Boryslavskaya 2011).
- Bodies of self-organization of the population enable citizens to actively participate in decision-making and the administration of local affairs (Batanov 2008).

Primary Level of Local Self-Government

According to Boryslavska (2011), a territorial community, composed of the inhabitants of a municipality, city, or other local units, constitutes the fundamental subject of local self-government, bearing the principal functions and powers within local administration. The amalgamation of individual municipalities can form larger territorial units that exercise self-governance through their own bodies, while also having the option to elect a joint head of the municipality (Kondratska 2015). The territorial community represents the organizational basis of local self-government, where decision-making on local matters is carried out.

At the head of each territorial community stands the head of the municipality, city, or other local unit. This individual is elected by the citizens of the respective territorial community based on the principles of universal, equal, and direct suffrage, by secret ballot, for a term of four years. The head of the territorial community leads both the local council and its executive body, thereby ensuring the effective management and administration of local affairs (Kondratska 2015).

Key powers and responsibilities of the head of the territorial community include:

- The head has the authority to appoint and dismiss department heads and other executive personnel of the council and other organizational units of municipal administration, as well as to manage enterprises and institutions administered by the municipality (Kondratska 2015).
- The head is responsible for the administration of both budgetary and extrabudgetary funds of the territorial community, ensuring the efficient utilization of public finances for local needs (Batanov 2008).
- The head of the municipality represents the territorial community and its bodies in interactions with state authorities and other self-governing bodies. This function also encompasses communication with superior institutions and the assurance of legal and administrative continuity across different levels of governance (Batanov 2008).

According to Sergejeva (2017), the head of the territorial community is a key element of local self-government, coordinating all administrative, legal, and financial processes within the municipality or city, with their decisions and activities directly impacting the quality of life of citizens.

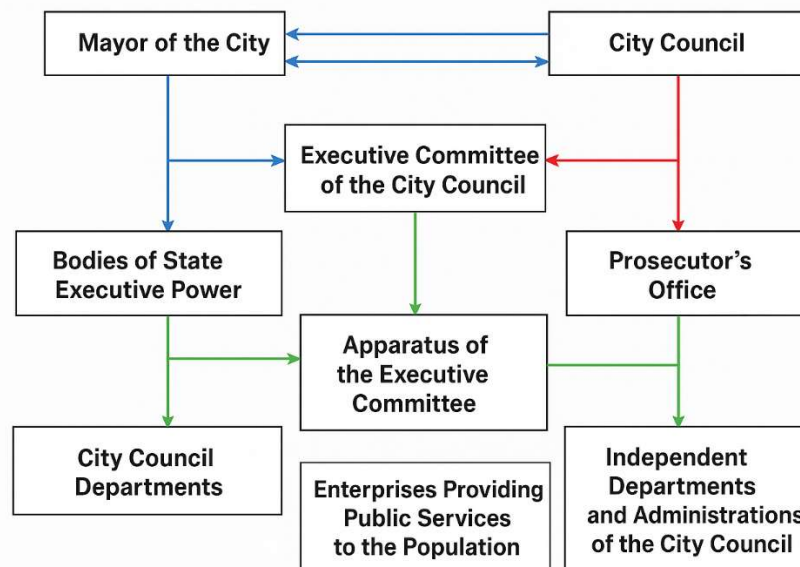


Figure 2: Relationships in Local Self-Government

Source: Own elaboration based on Law No. 280/97-VR "On Local Self-Government in Ukraine" (1997)

Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/280/97-%D0%B2%D1%80#Text>

The territorial community exercises its functions and powers either directly or through the bodies of local self-government and their representatives. The primary forms of direct local democracy include:

- Municipal elections – a mechanism for selecting representatives to local self-government bodies, including regional, district, city, and municipal councils, as well as elected officials such as mayors and heads of municipalities (Batanov 2008).
- Local referenda – an instrument of direct democracy through which members of the territorial community make decisions on fundamental issues of local importance. Voting is conducted by secret ballot, and the outcomes are binding (Bordenyuk 2011).
- General assemblies of citizens – these assemblies are organized at the local level within specific territorial units, such as houses, streets, neighborhoods, or microdistricts. They serve to discuss and resolve matters of local significance, thereby enabling active citizen participation in community life (Kondratska 2015).
- Local initiatives and public hearings – these forms of participation allow individuals or groups of community members to actively engage in the decision-making process. Citizens may initiate the consideration of local self-government issues or present proposals for solutions (Babaev 2010).

Rural, municipal, city, and district councils in cities (where established) perform the following functions:

1. They represent the will and interests of both the entire territorial community and specific groups of its members (Rusnák 2011).
2. They encompass the establishment of executive bodies, their approval, appointment or election of officials, oversight over their activities, and the direct administration of local affairs (Kondratska 2015).

Secondary Level of Local Self-Government

Representative bodies of local self-government within territorial units include:

1. Rural, municipal, and city councils – these are self-government bodies that represent the respective territorial units and exercise the functions and powers of local self-government on their behalf. They are composed of deputies elected by the residents of villages, municipalities, and cities. Their decisions are binding for the territory under their jurisdiction (Batanov 2008).
2. District and regional councils – these bodies represent the collective interests of the territorial communities of municipalities and cities. They are headed by chairpersons elected by the councils themselves from among their deputies (Babaev 2010).
3. District councils within cities – established based on the decision of the territorial community of a city or the city council (Babaev 2010).

The powers of district and regional councils have specific characteristics:

- Approval of plans for the socio-economic development of the respective regions (provinces, oblasts) (Batanov 2008).
- Redistribution of resources from the state budget to equalize local budgets (Yarmish, Seryogin 2002).
- Representation of the interests of the territorial self-government of the respective region in relations with central and local self-government authorities (Rusnák 2011).

According to Kondratska (2015), the particularity of the constitutional and legal status of district and regional councils lies in the absence of their own executive bodies, with the performance of their functions ensured by the local state administration bodies.

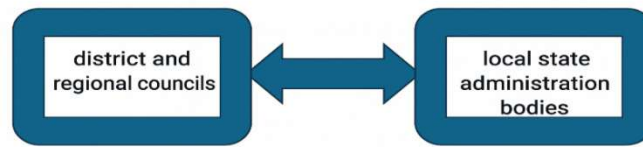


Figure 3: Specifics of the Constitutional and Legal Status of District and Regional Councils

Source: Own elaboration based on Law No. 280/97-VR "On Local Self-Government in Ukraine" of 1997

Available online: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/280/97-%D0%B2%D1%80#Text>

Chairperson of the District and Regional Council:

- organizes the activities of the council,
- manages financial resources allocated for council operations,
- signs decisions and minutes of council meetings,
- represents the council in relations with other authorities and organizations.

Councils and their executive committees, within their competence, issue normative acts in the form of decisions. To implement these decisions and fulfill executive and administrative tasks, executive bodies of the councils are established (Sergeyeva, 2017).

Executive committees, departments, and units of rural, city, and municipal councils are executive bodies created by the councils. These bodies possess:

1. Own authority – encompassing areas such as socio-economic and cultural development, planning, accounting, financial management, and regulation of activities of legal entities (Kondratska, 2015).
2. Delegated authority – involving the performance of executive and administrative functions transferred from bodies of executive power (Kondratska, 2015).

Areas of competence of council executive bodies include:

- Planning, budgeting, and financing,
- Management of municipal property,
- Housing and communal services,
- Trade, transport, and communications,
- Education, healthcare, culture, and sports,
- Land relations and environmental protection,
- Social protection of the population (Batanov, 2008).

Bodies of citizen self-organization may be established at the initiative of residents with the consent of local councils and include house, street, or city councils (Boryslavskaja, 2011). Their main functions include:

1. Promoting citizen participation in local decision-making,
2. Addressing the social, cultural, and everyday needs of residents,
3. Supporting the development of the respective territory (Kondratska, 2015).

For more effective exercise of powers and protection of the rights of territorial units, local governments may form associations. The functions of such associations include:

- Cooperation in protecting the rights and interests of territorial units,
- Solving common problems of territorial communities,
- Exchange of experience and preparation of development programs (Kondratska, 2015).

Functions of local self-government in Ukraine, as defined by the Constitution and laws, can be divided into:

- Political functions – supporting local referenda, elections, and direct democracy; cooperation within associations of local governments.
- Economic functions – management of municipal property, establishment and administration of municipal enterprises, approval and control of local budgets, regulation of land relations (Rusnák, 2011).
- Social functions – support and protection of the social welfare of the population.
- Cultural functions – development of education, sports, culture, and spiritual life.
- Environmental functions – protection and improvement of the environment (Batanov, 2008).

Social functions of self-government include approval of socio-economic development programs for regions and districts and oversight of their implementation, approval of territorial planning, management of healthcare institutions owned by territorial communities, provision of social assistance to persons with disabilities, war and labor veterans, large families, and addressing guardianship and custodianship matters in accordance with legal procedures (Kondratska, 2015).

Cultural functions of self-government involve approval and supervision of cultural development programs of regions and districts, management of educational and cultural institutions belonging to territorial communities, and designation of historical, cultural, or scientific objects as cultural or historical monuments (Bordenyuk, 2011).

Environmental functions of self-government are ensured through the organization of territories and objects of the local natural reserve fund, as well as the designation of natural objects with environmental value as natural monuments (Babaev, 2010).

3 Local self-government reform in Ukraine

An important component of constitutional reform in Ukraine is the decentralization of power and the expansion of local authorities' competencies. In 2014, the Concept of Reform of Local Self-Government and Territorial Organization of Power was adopted, emphasizing the decentralization of power (strengthening the competencies) of local self-government and restructuring the management system at the regional and district levels.

Key innovations of decentralization include:

1. Introduction of a three-tier administrative-territorial structure: region, district, community, with expanded local self-government powers (Rusnák, 2011).
2. Transfer of executive power from local administrations to the executive bodies of councils.
3. Division of competencies among self-government bodies based on the principle of subsidiarity, aiming to provide communities with the broadest possible powers (Naumova, 2017).
4. Financial support for the exercise of local self-government powers.
5. Abolition of local state administrations and creation of state representative councils responsible for oversight, supervision, and coordination (Kondratska, 2015).

Interaction with other levels of government: Local self-governments cooperate with local state administrations, which exercise executive power at the local level. This cooperation includes coordinating the activities of local state administrations with self-governments and providing methodological and financial support to local self-governments (Kondratska, 2015).

Control and oversight:

The activities of local self-governments are monitored at multiple levels:

1. Government authorities – ensuring legality and compliance with government policy.
2. Public control – through citizen participation in local affairs, public hearings, and referenda.
3. Internal control – conducted through audits and inspections carried out by the executive bodies of councils (Naumova, 2017).

In Ukraine, local self-government is considered the third tier in the system-structural organization of public power, after the state apparatus and the system of authorities of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC). This system is based on the European continental (French) model, which constitutionally recognizes the independence of local self-government. However, at the district and regional levels, it is connected with local executive authorities – local state administrations – and subjected to state oversight. According to Kondratska (2015), the institution of delegated authority leads to an overlap between state and municipal powers,

and the delegation of executive powers from district and regional councils to relevant state administrations further reinforces this process.

This model, regarded as the most centralized among Western democracies, is effective under specific conditions. It is suitable when civil society is still in the process of formation, its institutions are inactive, or the capacity of self-governing territorial communities to exercise self-government is limited (Kondratska, 2017). It is also applicable in cases of a real separatist threat or when local self-government exceeds legally defined boundaries. In such instances, local state authorities play a decisive role, where their assertive actions compensate for the weakness of local self-government or suppress signs of separatism. The French model is also justified when a controlled transition from strict state centralization to partial decentralization is required (Kondratska, 2020).

According to Naumova (2017), however, the Ukrainian legislator, in adapting this model, did not consider—or intentionally ignored—the fact that the European continental model not only clearly delineates the functions and powers between territorial self-government and state authorities but also provides real guarantees of local self-government independence. In Ukraine, this model was deformed by the introduction of direct state administration at the district and regional levels. This measure did not contribute to the development of local self-government or more effective local governance, nor did it prevent separatist tendencies (Kondratska, 2017).

In the current situation, implementing power decentralization and improving the systemic and structural organization of local self-government is essential. It serves not only as a means to improve the socio-political and socio-economic situation in the country but also as a fundamental condition for preserving Ukrainian statehood, ensuring territorial integrity, and strengthening national security.

At the basic level, the local self-government model in Ukraine is trialistic, with primary competencies divided among three bodies: the mayor of a municipality, village, or city; the relevant local council; and its executive committee (Naumova, 2017). At higher levels (district and regional), however, the system has a monistic character, as all primary competencies are concentrated in the respective local council (Kondratska, 2020). Local state administrations at these levels predominantly exercise delegated powers or perform one-off tasks.

Conclusion

This study focuses on a detailed examination of the legal foundation of local self-government, providing a comprehensive overview of the principal legal regulations governing local self-government in Ukraine, and analyzing key provisions of the Constitution of Ukraine, as well as laws and regulations adopted within the local self-government system.

The Constitution of Ukraine recognizes local self-government as the right of territorial communities – residents of villages, towns, and cities – to independently address matters of local significance within the framework of the Constitution and applicable laws of Ukraine.

Territorial communities exercise this right directly through local referenda or through their self-government bodies. The system of self-government bodies includes villages, towns, cities, municipal councils, and their executive committees, as well as regional and district councils, which represent the collective interests of these territorial communities. The law may also permit the creation of self-organized citizen bodies, such as committees at the level of a house, street, or district, to which certain competencies, financial resources, and property may be delegated.

Unlike the previous Soviet model of local self-government, contemporary local self-government bodies in Ukraine possess an independent status, in accordance with the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Nevertheless, some executive competencies may be delegated to these bodies by law, with their execution subject to oversight by the relevant executive authorities.

The study also addresses current challenges, such as maintaining a unified legal framework for the country, generating material and financial resources for municipalities, regulating limits on self-government interference in local economic activity, and issues related to oversight and accountability of administrative authorities.

Against the backdrop of objective factors, such as war, adverse economic conditions, and financial crises, as well as the actual disengagement of the population from decision-making processes concerning local affairs, subjective factors also emerge, including the legal support for self-government.

In the process of establishing local self-government as a key element of democracy and a fundamental pillar of the constitutional system of Ukraine, both objective and subjective challenges exist. Timely resolution of these issues will contribute to the population's progress toward freedom and prosperity. Among all forms of independence, the independence of local communities is most vulnerable to interference from central and local authorities. Local self-government institutions alone are not capable of resisting state pressure. Ensuring the stability and autonomy of the population in addressing local matters will be sustainable only when it

becomes an integral part of societal practices and is consistently implemented through legislation.

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Parliamentary Museums and Exhibitions in Central Europe

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Abstract

The article focuses on museums and exhibitions that present and promote the history of parliaments in Central European countries. In the Czech and Polish parliaments, there are only shorter exhibitions presenting some elements of their constitutional history. The situation is similar in Slovakia; however, Slovakia has, within the framework of the Slovak National Museum, a separate Museum of Slovak National Councils (1848, 1918, 1944) in Myjava. Although it is not a typical parliamentary museum, it contains important information on Slovak public history. The oldest traditions are held by the Hungarian parliamentary museum in Budapest, which existed in the building of Hungarian Parliament between 1929 and 1949 and then revived in 2014. In the neoclassical building of the Austrian Parliament in Vienna, there is an impressive and interactive exhibition called Demokratikum, which focuses not only on presenting Austrian parliamentarism but also mainly on Austrian origins of democracy and forms of democratic participation. The Austrian, Hungarian, and Slovak models of presenting their legislative and constitutional traditions are therefore different. Austria focuses primarily on presenting its democratic past, Hungary on the history of its parliamentarism, and Slovakia on the Slovak national-emancipation process in 19th century.

Key words: constitution, democracy, exhibition, museum, parliament

Introduction

Central Europe has a rich history of national representative bodies, whose origins go back to the Middle Ages. The terms Sejm, Snem, or Országgyűlés have been used for centuries to refer to them. Naturally, various Latin names were also originally used. (Képes, 2019, 15-16.) However, the emergence of modern parliaments, which, in addition to legislative functions, also effectively controlled the government and adopted budgets, can only be discussed from the mid-19th century onwards.

One of the first modern constitutions on the old continent was adopted on May 3, 1791, in the Polish-Lithuanian state. This constitution was born before the first French constitution (1791), but it soon ceased to exist, so the Poles were able to restore their own national bicameral parliamentarism only after 1918. Before that, they became familiar with modern parliaments within the Habsburg Empire, unified Germany, and, from the beginning of the 20th century, also in Tsarist Russia. (Kallas, 1999, 323-327.) The other nations of Central Europe

shaped their modern representative bodies and gained parliamentary experience within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

The specific conditions and concrete timing of this process were different. The acceptance of individual parliamentary bodies and their significance in the process of nation-building and building of modern political identity also varied. The overall relationship to the past in the Central European region also has many national aspects. In addition, political and legal priorities sometimes changed depending on the overall developments. These factors continue to influence the processes of shaping memory policy and, through them, the cultivation of one's own constitutional identity.

Naturally, a lot always depended on the concrete forms of democratic, authoritarian, or dictatorial regimes in the countries of the region at the time. The relationship of individual political regimes to their own parliamentary past did not have to be identical. After 1989, however, all Central European states live under conditions of parliamentary democracy. Democracy generally makes the traditions of its own parliamentarism popular and politically necessary. The active policy of democracy-building is also very important.

In the process of popularizing their own democratic and parliamentary history, parliamentary bodies themselves, their buildings, the old prominent members, various artifacts connected with parliaments in culture, references in literature, folklore, and other similar elements can play an important role. Nowadays, promoting their own parliamentary history and traditions is a task for the professional parliamentary apparatus itself; however, fundamental decisions in this sphere of public life are also made by high-level politics.

The situation of individual Central European national parliaments in this area is not the same. From this perspective, the region can be divided into two major groups. The first group consists of countries whose parliaments have at most a small exhibition, which includes brief information about their history and possibly a few important historical artifacts and symbols (e.g. original texts, insignias, flags etc.). This group primarily includes the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. The absence of a dedicated parliamentary museum, however, does not mean a complete lack of self-promotion, which can be carried out through organized tours, educational programs, or open house events.

The existence of a special museum or a well-developed permanent exhibition always accessible to the general public, however, represents a different level of parliamentary self-presentation and promotion of the purpose of its existence. The second group of countries, therefore, consists of states that have such an institution. Specifically, this refers to Austria and Hungary, although in the case of Austria, it is more of a large permanent exhibition than a museum.

1 Slovakia

Slovakia holds a unique position among the Central European countries, because in the building of the National Council there is only a small exhibition with a few interesting exhibits, which is far from being a museum. However, in the town of Myjava, since 1968, there has been the Museum of Slovak National Councils, which is part of the Slovak National Museum headquartered in Bratislava. It is therefore not an integral part of the Slovak parliament. However, the Slovak parliament traces its roots precisely to the first Slovak National Council, which convened on September 19, 1848, in the house of Mrs. Anna Koléniová¹, which is still part of the museum to this day. (SNM) The museum was established in Myjava, a small town on the Czech-Slovak border, because in 1848 this region was home to the first Slovak national armed uprising. This uprising was led by the first Slovak National Council.

The museum in Myjava uses the grammatical plural in the name in the case of national councils. In modern Slovak history, such a representative political body was actually formed three times – first during the revolutionary Spring of Nations in 1848, then after the collapse of Austro-Hungary in October 1918, and finally at the end of 1943, as the central body of the Slovak anti-fascist resistance movement. (Pekník, 2009)

It then transformed in 1944 into the leading body of the Slovak National Uprising against Nazi Germany (August–October 1944). Until then, it was always a political representative body, whose members were not directly elected. The Slovak National Council only became a truly elected representative body for the whole of Slovakia in 1946. In 1946, the members of the Slovak National Council did gain electoral legitimacy, but direct elections had not yet taken place. 100 mandates within the Slovak parliament based in Bratislava were allocated in August 1946 according to the results of the elections to the Czechoslovak Constituent Assembly in May 1946. At that time, the overwhelming majority in Slovakia was won by the politicians of the Democratic Party. (Podolec, 2017, 285-299.) Since then, it has functioned as the highest Slovak representative body, and since 1993 at the level of an independent and sovereign Slovak Republic.

The museum in Myjava has a distinctive character and profile. Its main goal is not to present the development of Slovak parliamentarism, but rather the struggle of the Slovaks for the recognition of their national and state identity, or independence. The main focus of the

¹ At that time, the Slovak National Council had only eight members - three political leaders, three military commanders, and two secretaries. Therefore, this body could meet in a single room of Mrs. Koléniová's private house.

museum's permanent exhibition is on the events of 1848/1849. In addition, its exhibitions also serve the purposes of a regional museum.

The symbolism of 1848 is highlighted by various sculptures, reliefs, and other artifacts within the museum, such as the group sculpture 'The Nation Awakening from Servitude,' the sculpture 'Slavic Linden,' and so on. The museum also has an external exhibition outside the town of Myjava (Košariská), dedicated to the figure of Milan Rastislav Štefánik, the founder of the First Czechoslovak Republic. Therefore, it is not a classic parliamentary museum, although it has close ties with the symbolism of the current Slovak parliament.

2 Hungary

The Hungarian Parliamentary Museum in Budapest is probably one of the oldest museums of its kind in Europe. The decision to establish it within the parliament was made as early as 1923, but it only began operating in 1929. (Lengyel-Kedves, 2016, 173-186.) It experienced its pre-war golden period at the end of the 1930s, when it was among the most popular museums in the Hungarian capital. Its popularity was also boosted by the fact that it was located directly in the legislative building and admission was free.

In the pre-war years, the museum focused on collecting the legacies and heritage of prominent political figures, but it also collected various artifacts related to Hungarian constitutional history and the history of the building of parliament. It began presenting its history starting from the Middle Ages, but overall, its work was thematically dominated by the 19th century. (Cs. Lengyel, 2016, 109-120.)

Although its staff originally avoided current politics, they later began organizing exhibitions on contemporary political developments in the first half of the 20th century. They also presented the consequences of the Treaty of Trianon. In 1942, due to wartime events, the museum had to close its doors, and during the battles for Budapest (1944/1945), it suffered great losses along with the damaged parliamentary building. However, its staff attempted to resume its activities immediately after the war, collecting materials related also to the revived political life in 1945-1947, but the new communist political power decided to close the museum. Its collections, which before the war comprised approximately 16,000 exhibits and documents, were divided among various Hungarian museums. (Lengyel-Kedves, 2016, 173-186.)

The Hungarian Parliamentary Museum resumed its activities in 2014 on a new legal basis. (Berényi 2016) The museum is no longer located directly in the parliament building, but in the new visitor center, which is situated underground near the northern wing of the impressive neo-Gothic parliamentary building. Visiting the museum is free, and tourists only have to pay for a tour of the parliament.

The centerpiece here is the permanent exhibition „A Thousand Years of the Hungarian Parliament.” Both tours can be combined, but they can also be taken separately. From the visitor center, it is also possible to visit other exhibitions, which, for example, are connected to the construction of the parliament building at the beginning of the 20th century or to the revolutionary events of 1956.

The museum's exhibits are labeled in two languages, Hungarian and English, and the supplementary text is also in these languages. However, the entire tour can be taken with commentary in all major world languages and in the languages of Hungary's neighboring countries. In addition, the text is available in Greek, Hebrew, Japanese, Portugal and Vietnamese.

The Parliamentary Museum in Budapest uses parallelly traditional and very modern methods. The exhibition, whose main theme is the development of the Hungarian legislature (Parliament) from the early Middle Ages to the present, contains a large number of physical objects (for example, a decorated urn into which members of the lower house cast their votes during the interwar period), historical documents, as well as short films, newspapers, the original voices of old politicians, or the uniforms of constitutional officials and the guards of the parliament building. There are also wax figures depicting, for example, Maria Theresa, a model of an open-air medieval parliamentary session in the village of Rákos near Buda, and similar displays. Historical persons (Lajos Kossuth, Ferenc Deák etc.) of the 19th-century liberal movement, who contributed to the transformation of the feudal parliament into a modern representative legislature, play an important role here. The first women (Margit Slachta and Anna Kéthly) in the Hungarian parliament also have a place in the exhibition. The last images and exhibits are dedicated to the restoration of the democratic parliament in 1990. (Berényi, 2016)

3 Austria

Austria is connected with Hungary not only by a long common history but also by the impressive parliament building. Originally, it was the imperial parliament of the western (Austrian) part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Cisleithania). It was built in the 1870s in a neoclassical style. Since the interwar period, the former imperial parliament has served as the parliament of the new Austrian Republic. Unlike the current Hungarian parliament, it has retained a bicameral character, which is mainly related to Austria's federal structure.

To this day, it combines both old and modern elements. The Federal Council, for example, meets in a beautifully decorated room that was originally, before 1918, a budget hall and a meeting place for Austrian and Hungarian parliamentary delegations. During the republic period, parliamentary committees met here for a long time. The National Council – the lower

but decisive chamber of the Austrian parliament – meets in the modernly renovated spaces of the former Upper Chamber of the former Imperial Council (Herrenhaus), which was destroyed by a bomb during World War II. The room is dominated by wooden walls, a glass roof, wooden benches for the deputies, and other decorations. The entire hall exudes a minimalist and refreshing spirit of the modern era.

In the former grand hall of the lower chamber (chamber of deputies) of the Imperial Council, where in the past, among others, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk also met, meetings are no longer held regularly; however, occasional joint ceremonial sessions of both chambers of the Austrian parliament are sometimes held here. It is also where the inauguration of the new president of the republic takes place. The impressive hall, where at the end of the 19th century 516 deputies from 17 kingdoms and countries forming the Austrian part of the common monarchy met, is built in the style of Ancient Greece and Rome. To some extent, the hall resembles the ancient Roman Senate.

On the ground floor of the Austrian Parliament building – opposite the main entrance – there is an information desk and then a particularly interesting bilingual (German and English) exhibition: Demokratikum - Experience Parliament (in German: Erlebnis Parlament). Within it, 27 interactive media stations illustrate the development of democracy in Austria, as well as possible forms of democratic participation for citizens and the overall work of the parliament. (Welcome to Parliament)

Unlike the Hungarian Parliament, the presentation of Austrian parliamentary development does not begin in the Middle Ages, but only in 1848, when a liberal constitutional system began to be established in Central Europe. The development of the constitutional system in Austria is divided into periods before the First World War, the interwar republican period, the period of Nazism, and the post-war restoration of independent Austrian statehood. Key laws here include the constitutional laws of December 1867 and the constitution of 1920. The key periods of Austrian constitutional development here are defined by the years 1848 (the civic liberal revolution), 1867 (Austro-Hungarian dualism), 1918 (declaration of the republic), 1920 (adoption of the constitution), 1934 (authoritarian coup d'état), 1938 (Anschluss), 1945 (end of Nazism, restoration of Austria, and the beginning of a new democracy), 1955 (regaining of sovereignty), and 2004 (entry into the EU). The years 1848 and 1955 are presented here as positive turning points in Austrian history.

The exhibition contains many pictures, posters, portraits, as well as explanatory text. The exhibition features several interactive tables, and from the films projected onto the tables, Austrian politicians speak to the visitors. The target audience of the exhibition includes not only adult citizens but also children and students, to whom a large part of the exhibition is adapted.

Next to the exhibition, the bookstore and souvenir shop also offer a variety of books for children and young people of different age groups. Thematically, these publications deal with the relationship between law and legislation, the state and its citizens, or the explanation and promotion of the current constitution. Overall, Demokratikum—true to its name—is focused on strengthening democratic awareness and is oriented towards the future.

In the Austrian Parliament, even the bistro, canteen, and café promote democracy, constitutionality, and Austrian legal traditions. It is dedicated, according to the prominent Austrian legal theorist, one of the main authors of the 1920 constitution and later president of the Constitutional Court, Hans Kelsen – Kelsen in Parliament. The menu in the canteen boasts a humorous title, Hungry for Democracy. On the restaurant's website, there are also phrases such as: „Our democracy is hungry.” Most of the dishes represent and promote Austrian cuisine, which the restaurants also emphasize in their self-presentation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that the countries of Central Europe do not neglect their parliamentary heritage and also attempt to cultivate their constitutional-democratic traditions. At the same time, however, museums and exhibitions related to the legislative body do not represent a unified model in the region. Naturally, this is not a problem, as each nation and state of Central Europe, despite many similarities and shared historical roots, still has a slightly different specific past.

This is also reflected in the priorities of individual museums and exhibitions. The oldest and probably the largest museum in terms of area in Budapest, for example, emphasizes primarily the history of the parliament and legislation. The Austrian Parliament and its extensive and methodologically refined exhibition, Demokratikum, is focused more on the presentation and promotion of democracy and its values. It sees the roots of constitutional democracy primarily in the 19th century, not in the distant feudal past. The Museum of the Slovak National Councils in Myjava, on the other hand, emphasizes primarily the national-state emancipation of Slovaks. This is mainly about the struggles of Slovaks for the recognition of their national individuality and later about achieving their own statehood, which was much more evident to the Austrians and Hungarians. Moreover, the Slovak museum is not located in the parliament building, or even in the capital of Slovakia. In addition to its main focus, it also serves as a regional museum. Post-war — otherwise very successful — Austria had to reflect on its war-era Nazi past, which is probably why the emphasis on democracy here is no coincidence. Hungary, on the other hand, has traditionally been proud of its old statehood and constitutional traditions, regardless of whether they are modern or old parliamentary traditions. In any case,

in all the countries mentioned, this is an important forum for fostering democratic awareness and constitutional patriotism.

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Financing Green Projects: Local Government Approaches and Benefits for Residents

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Abstract

The article analyses the engagement of the Košice-Dargovských hrdinov city district in implementing “green” projects and proposes solutions for sustainable urban development at the local level. Theoretical frameworks of public finance and green economy are outlined as a basis for examining how public institutions can support environmentally beneficial projects. The current state of the city district is evaluated, including its financial resources and existing green initiatives, with a SWOT analysis identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The results highlight the need for external funding and community involvement to overcome budget constraints. Several proposals are discussed – from establishing partnerships and nonprofit organisations to specific green projects (rain gardens, park revitalisation, green infrastructure) – that could significantly mitigate adverse climate impacts and improve residents' quality of life. These recommendations, while economically feasible and ecologically beneficial, would contribute to the development of the district and serve as an inspiration for other municipalities.

Keywords: *green economy, green projects, public funding, city district, sustainable development*

Introduction

Global climate change and environmental degradation place increased demands on public administration in the area of sustainable development of cities and municipalities. Green projects, such as measures aimed at mitigating the effects of heat waves, rainwater retention and reducing emissions, are becoming an essential part of modern city management. Public administration plays a key role in supporting and financing such initiatives, which bring benefits to society and improve the quality of life of residents (Žárska 2007). Many European cities are therefore integrating a green vision into their development strategies, as exemplified by the city of Košice's bid to become European Green City 2023. Although Košice did not ultimately win the European Green City 2023 title, the candidacy itself highlighted the need for systematic environmental measures in the city.

This paper focuses on the Košice-Dargovských hrdinov district (also known as Furča) as a case study of green project financing at the local level. It is a residential district with approximately 25-28 thousand inhabitants on the eastern edge of Košice, which, like other local governments, faces the challenges of a limited budget, but at the same time pressure to improve the environment and infrastructure for its residents. This paper presents an analytical assessment of the local conditions in the Košice-Dargovských hrdinov district, focusing on existing green projects and identified climate challenges.

Table 1: Green vision for the city of Košice by 2030

Zero ecological, water and carbon footprint in the city
Balanced internal temperature of the city and the surrounding climate
Use of renewable energy sources and protection of natural resources
Support and implementation of ecological ideas and innovations in the public sector
Creation of an environment with social and natural benefits

Source: own processing

The aim is to provide an overview of the theoretical basis for financing green measures in public administration, to assess the current situation in a selected city district and to present specific proposals for solutions. The proposed measures should not only improve environmental conditions and the quality of life of residents, but also show how local government can effectively use available financial resources (both internal and external) for projects in the spirit of the green economy.

1 Theoretical basis of the research

Public sector financing differs from private sector financing – while private finance pursues profit, public finance focuses primarily on meeting public needs and fulfilling the functions of the state and local governments (Lipták 1999). Public financing includes a system of public revenues (e.g. taxes, fees, subsidies) and public expenditures, which enables the provision of public services (Hrašková 2012). From the perspective of local government, the local budgets of municipalities and towns, which are compiled according to principles defined by law (e.g. Act No. 583/2004 Coll. on the budgetary rules of local government), are of key importance. Programme budgeting in local government is intended to increase the efficiency and transparency of the use of public resources (Peková 2004). However, for small territorial units such as the city districts of Košice, the budget is often limited – local government often

manages only a limited amount of funds allocated by the city of Košice and has minimal income of its own. Therefore, when financing development or environmental projects, it is necessary to seek external sources (state subsidies, grants, European funds) to supplement local budgets (Beličková et al. 2010).

In addition to the economic aspect, the environmental concept of the green economy is also taken into account in considerations of urban development. The term *green economy* emerged in the late 1980s and is now used to describe an economy that takes into account environmental limits and sustainability goals (Kasztelan 2017). According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), a green economy is one that promotes human well-being and social equity while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological damage (UNEP 2009). It is essentially an economy that uses resources efficiently and cares for natural capital so that it is available for future generations. The principles of the green economy include, for example, an emphasis on resource efficiency, pollution reduction, biodiversity protection and the equitable distribution of development benefits (Kanianská et al. 2017). Green jobs, i.e. jobs that contribute to environmentally beneficial activities and technologies, are also an important part of the green economy (Kordošová and Gabčíková 2014).

In the context of spatial planning, the concept of green infrastructure is often applied, which represents an interconnected network of green elements (parks, forests, gardens, green roofs, etc.) in the urban environment. Green infrastructure improves the ecological stability of an area, contributes to the preservation of biodiversity and, at the same time, improves the quality of life of residents by providing recreational areas and cooling effects in urban environments (European Environment Agency 2011). Investments in green infrastructure and sustainable mobility in cities are key adaptation measures to mitigate the effects of climate change (Guštafiková et al. 2014).

Several initiatives have been launched at both supranational and national level to support green investment. The European Union is promoting a green growth strategy that combines economic development with environmental protection. According to the European Commission, the transition to a green economy also has significant employment potential – *green growth* can bring new job opportunities in the clean energy, building renovation and waste management sectors (European Commission 2012). In its study *Green Growth in Cities*, the OECD emphasises that cities play a crucial role in achieving the goals of the green economy, as it is in cities that most resources are consumed and most emissions are generated, but at the same time, it is here that there is the greatest scope for innovation in the fields of energy, transport and urban planning (OECD 2013).

In Slovakia, the topic of green financing resonates within the Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021–2027), which allocates a significant portion of EU resources to support the green

economy and climate change adaptation (Government Office of the Slovak Republic 2021). Specifically, the Slovak Recovery Plan allocates funds for sustainable transport, the renovation of buildings to increase energy efficiency, the development of renewable energy sources and climate adaptation measures in cities. Municipalities and cities can thus draw on funds for rainwater retention, planting greenery, eco-friendly public transport and the renovation of public spaces, for example. In addition, there are grant programmes run by foundations and state funds that support smaller community environmental projects (an example is the Slovenská sporiteľňa Foundation's grant of €10-15,000 for innovative green projects for local authorities and non-governmental organisations – SLSP Foundation 2023).

Overall, theoretical principles suggest that the successful implementation of green projects requires a combination of economic and environmental approaches. Public administration must seek financial mechanisms that allow investment in environmental measures without placing an excessive burden on public budgets. At the same time, it is necessary to involve the community and the private sector – either through partnerships or by creating incentives – so that green projects become a common priority for all stakeholders.

2 Objectives and working methods

The main objective of this paper is to propose solutions and measures that would lead to the effective implementation of green projects financed from public and external sources in the Košice-Dargovských hrdinov district. These measures should contribute to the further development of the district under review, but above all to the effective mitigation of adverse climate impacts and a significant improvement in the quality of life of residents and the overall environment in the housing estate.

In order to formulate relevant proposals, it was necessary to complete several subtasks:

- analyse the current state of the Dargovských hrdinov district in terms of its financial possibilities and previous activities in the area of green projects;
- identify the main problems and shortcomings that hinder the development of environmental measures in the area;
- to reveal existing strengths and opportunities that can be built on (e.g. community potential, available grants); and finally
- to examine relevant examples and recommendations from literature and practice that could be applied in the conditions of the municipality under review.

The methodology consisted of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. In the initial phase, a study of documents was carried out – in addition to relevant literature on the green economy and public finances, internal materials from the local authority of the Dargovských hrdinov borough (e.g. the borough's budget for 2022–2023) and strategic

documents of the city of Košice relating to the environment (e.g. conceptual plans for a *Green City*). A situational analysis in the form of a SWOT analysis was also used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the borough, as well as opportunities and threats in the area of environmental projects. The SWOT analysis helped to obtain a comprehensive picture of the internal capacities of the housing estate (e.g. the existence of green spaces, community initiatives) and external influences (e.g. the availability of EU funds vs. climate change threatening the area).

Semi-structured interviews with local government representatives and experts involved in environmental projects in Košice were also used to collect current data. These interviews provided a practical view of the feasibility of the proposed measures and helped to identify barriers (e.g. legislative restrictions, lack of human resources) to the implementation of green projects. The findings from the analyses and consultations then served as a basis for formulating specific proposals for solutions at the end of the paper.

The results of the analytical methods and findings from the field are presented in the following section as part of an overview of the current situation and a subsequent discussion of possible solutions. This structure makes it possible to link theoretical knowledge with empirical findings and subsequently derive recommendations for public administration practice.

3 Results

Profile and current state of the city district

In recent years, the city of Košice as a whole has declared its ambition to improve the environment and adapt to climate change. The effort to compete for the title of European Green City 2023 was one of the impulses for the preparation of several project plans focused on greenery, water features and sustainable transport. As the second largest city in Slovakia (with a population of approximately 240,000), Košice struggles with similar problems of air quality and overheating of the urban environment as other European cities – significant sources of pollution include heavy traffic, lack of greenery in some neighbourhoods, and extreme weather events (heat waves in summer, torrential rains). In response to these challenges, the city is gradually implementing measures: in 2022, it completed the reconstruction of the historic Singing Fountain in the centre (as an element of microclimate cooling) and renovated several parks, with a total investment in "green projects" exceeding €3 million (City of Košice 2023a).

Košice-Dargovských hrdinov (hereinafter DH) is one of the 22 districts of Košice, located on the eastern slope above the city. It is a housing estate built mainly in the 1970s and 1980s, with extensive residential blocks and specific terraced buildings. The borough covers a relatively large area; in addition to residential areas, it also includes the adjacent *Furča* forest

park and several smaller parks and playgrounds within the housing estate. In terms of population, it is one of the larger city districts (approximately 25–28 thousand inhabitants, representing about 10% of the population of Košice). Demographically, it is mainly families and older residents living in prefabricated buildings; the younger generation is attracted to the surrounding family houses in nearby villages, which emphasises the importance of maintaining the quality of life in the housing estate.

In terms of financial resources, the DH borough depends on the budget of the city of Košice, which redistributes part of its tax revenues to municipalities and boroughs. The borough's own revenues (e.g., local fees, rents) make up only a small fraction of its budget. For example, the borough's budget for 2022 was approximately €1.3 million for current expenditure (salaries, maintenance, services) and around €100,000 for capital expenditure (investments), of which only a negligible amount could be allocated to environmental projects (MiÚ Dargovských hrdinov 2023). Such limited financial resources are sufficient primarily for basic maintenance of public spaces (e.g. mowing lawns, repairing pavements), but do not allow for the implementation of more extensive investment projects, such as the comprehensive revitalisation of parks or the systematic planting of trees throughout the housing estate. Given these budgetary constraints, it is therefore necessary to combine several sources of funding to enable the implementation of green projects at the borough level. For better orientation, two summary tables are provided in this section: Table 1 summarises the financing options and Table 2 provides a SWOT analysis.

Table 2: Financing options for green projects at the local government level

Source of funding	Characteristics	Suitable use
City district budget	Limited amount of own resources	Minor modifications to green areas
Košice city budget	Higher investment potential	Revitalisation of parks
European Union funds	Linked to calls and projects	Climate adaptation
Slovak Republic Recovery and Resilience Plan	Support for green transformation	Energy efficiency
Foundation grants	Flexible smaller funding	Community projects
Participatory budgeting	Involvement of residents	Local improvements
Public-private partnerships	Co-financing	Lighting, planting

Source: own processing

In practice, the DH borough uses a combination of several sources, with external grants and participatory mechanisms playing a significant role, as documented by the projects listed below.

Despite financial limitations, however, the DH borough has begun to take its first steps in the area of green measures in recent years. In 2022, a pilot rain garden was created in the housing estate – this involved modifying the rainwater inlet and surrounding area at the Kalinovská nursery school, where vegetation capable of retaining rainwater was planted and space was created for natural water infiltration (Televízia Košice 2022). The rain garden project was implemented in cooperation with the Košice Region Volunteer Centre and financed by an external grant; it served as an example of a solution that can alleviate problems with rainwater runoff during heavy downpours and at the same time beautify the school's surroundings. Internal materials from the local authority show that in 2023, the borough prepared two smaller green projects – one was the revitalisation of greenery on Lidické námestie (restoration of the lawn, planting of shrubs and installation of an urban apiary) and the other was the installation of so-called *lawn* concrete blocks in selected car parks with the aim of creating green parking areas (a combination of paved areas and vegetation). These projects were approved by the local council at the end of 2022 with implementation planned for spring 2023. Although their scope was limited (budgets in the order of thousands of euros), they represented an important shift – they demonstrated the local government's willingness to invest in environmental measures, not just routine maintenance.

In addition to the local government itself, residents and the local community are playing an increasingly important role. In 2022, the Dargovských hrdinov district introduced a new tool – a participatory budget that allows citizens to directly propose and vote on projects in their neighbourhood. In the pilot year of the participatory budget 2023, €24,000 was allocated to support citizens' ideas (Košice-DH District 2022). Residents submitted several projects and voted on the three winners, which shared almost €20,000 (TASR 2023). Interestingly, one of the winning projects with maximum support of €8,000 was "Živý park pri fontáne" (Living Park by the Fountain) – a proposal to renovate the central housing estate park by the Ondava fountain, including moving the stage for cultural events, adding natural seating and landscaping (TASR 2023). Other successful projects included the reconstruction of a damaged statue in the housing estate and the improvement of the interior of the local library, which, although not strictly ecological interventions, contribute to the improvement of public space. The participatory budget continued in 2023 (the second year for projects implemented in 2024) with an allocation of €15,000 and a focus on sustainable ideas from residents – for example, the creation of relaxation zones, the addition of greenery, benches and solar lamps on playgrounds (Radio Košice 2023). This approach significantly strengthens opportunities for the city district, as it activates the local community and brings new ideas for improving the environment, which can be jointly financed from public funds and volunteer work.

Based on the collected data, a SWOT analysis was prepared (Table 3), which summarises the internal strengths and weaknesses of the Košice-Dargovských hrdinov district, as well as external opportunities and threats affecting the implementation of green projects.

Table 3: SWOT analysis of the Košice-Dargovských hrdinov district from the perspective of the implementation of green projects

Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> significant share of public green space (Furča forest park, inner blocks of the housing estate), large number of residents and potential for community involvement, Experience with the implementation of smaller environmental projects Participatory budgeting as a tool for public involvement support for environmental policies from the city of Košice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> limited financial resources of the city district, high technical debt of public spaces, dependence on budgetary decisions made by the city of Košice, lack of professional capacity to prepare projects and grants, Outdated housing estates with a high proportion of paved areas.
Opportunities (O)	Threats (T)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> availability of EU funds (Slovakia 2021–2027 Programme, Slovak Republic Recovery Plan), growing emphasis on climate adaptation in cities, opportunities for cooperation with the non-profit sector and private partners, growing interest among residents in the quality of public spaces, development of blue-green infrastructure in cities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> worsening impacts of climate change (heat waves, torrential rains), risk of insufficient co-financing for projects, administrative complexity of drawing on external resources, resistance from part of the public to changes in public spaces, increase in operating costs of local governments.

Source: own processing

The SWOT analysis synthesises findings from the budget framework and activities to date; the summarised findings also form the basis for recommendations in the discussion. The borough has a solid natural foundation – a relatively large number of existing green spaces – but these need revitalisation and maintenance. Another strength is the growing interest of residents in their surroundings, which is an asset that can be built on (volunteer activities, community projects). On the other hand, financial constraints and neglected infrastructure significantly limit the local government's ability to act quickly and on a larger scale. From the external environment, the availability of external sources of funding appears to be a key opportunity – currently, in particular, European funds within the framework of integrated

territorial investments for Košice. In 2023, support for nine green projects from European funds for Košice and its surroundings was approved, with a total value of €10.5 million, including a project to revitalise public spaces in the Dargovských hrdinov housing estate (near Baššovanského and Clementisova streets) with a budget of ~€449,000 (City of Košice 2023b). This project includes the restoration of the local park and fountain, the addition of green and blue infrastructure elements (rainwater retention) and the creation of space for community activities – implementation began in 2024 after funds were released from the fund. This is an example of how, if a borough has a well-prepared project and cooperates with the city on integrated planning, it can obtain a significant financial injection for an environmental project that it would not be able to implement from its own budget.

Environmental risks dominate among the threats – although these are general, they have specific manifestations in local conditions. For example, the Furča housing estate on a hill suffers from overheating in summer (large concrete parking areas and little greenery between the blocks) and, in the event of torrential rain, water quickly runs down the slopes, which can cause soil erosion and problems in the lower parts of the city. There is also uncertainty as to whether projects on paper will be successfully implemented – bureaucratic delays or the need for co-financing may jeopardise the use of approved EU funds. Local authorities with limited budgets must carefully consider their financial commitments in order to be able to co-finance 5-10% of project costs (which, for a €450,000 project, means finding ~€45,000 in their own budget or from other sources).

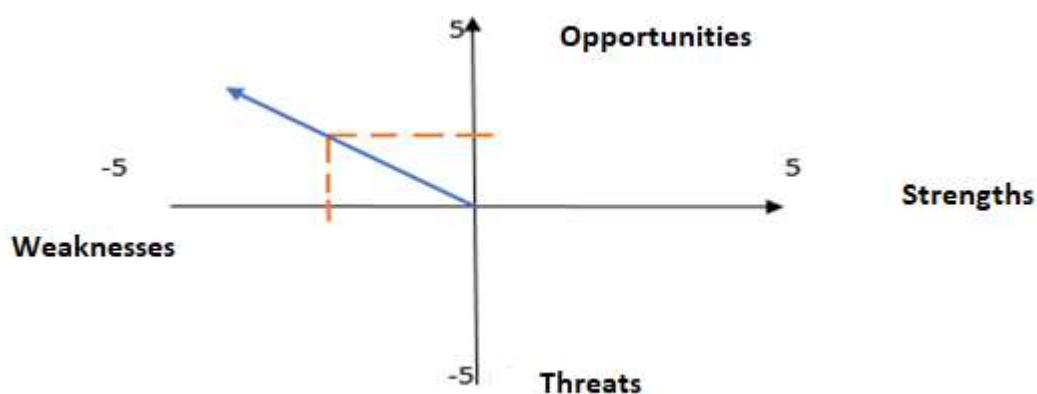


Figure 1: Graphical representation of the SWOT analysis of the Dargovských hrdinov municipal district

Source: own processing

Based on the calculations and graphical representation of the SWOT analysis, we found that the Dargovských hrdinov borough should pursue an alliance strategy. This strategy reflects the current situation in the borough, where weaknesses outweigh strengths, but in an

attractive environment. Overall, the evaluation of the results shows that the Dargovských hrdinov district has the potential to become a pilot "green housing estate" in Košice, but this requires a combination of: (a) improvements in internal financial and project management, (b) activation of external resources (grants, partnerships) and (c) continued citizen involvement. The following discussion elaborates on proposals that could fulfil these prerequisites and overcome the identified weaknesses and threats.

4 Discussion

Based on the results of the analysis, it is possible to identify several types of green projects that are feasible in the Košice-Dargovských hrdinov district and at the same time contribute to increasing environmental sustainability and the quality of life of residents. An overview of the proposed types of measures, their objectives and expected benefits is provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Overview of proposed green projects in the Košice-Dargovských hrdinov district

Project type	Main objective	Expected benefit
Rain gardens	Rainwater retention	Reduction of surface runoff
Revitalisation of parks	Improvement of public space	Higher quality of life
Green car parks	Reduction of overheating	Climate adaptation
Green roofs	Energy efficiency	Lower operating costs
Solar lighting	Sustainable energy	Energy savings
Community planting	Community involvement	Community strengthening

Source: own processing

The results of the analysis indicate that without external funding and innovative approaches, it is difficult to implement larger-scale green projects in the Dargovských hrdinov borough. Therefore, the key recommendation is to make better use of available opportunities – European funds, state subsidies, foundation grants – and to increase the borough's capacity to obtain these resources. One of the proposed measures is to establish a separate non-profit organisation or civic association that would work closely with the borough to prepare and implement green projects. Such an organisation (e.g. "*Green Furča*") could bring together local activists, experts (urban planners, landscape architects) and local government representatives. Its advantage would be flexibility – unlike the local authority, a non-profit organisation can more easily apply for smaller grants, accept sponsorship donations from companies and involve volunteers. In addition, the presence of an active non-governmental organisation directly in the city district would increase donors' confidence that projects will be

implemented communally and transparently (Kubiňcová 2010). An example of good practice is the Košice-Sever district, where a similar association helped to create a community garden and plant a row of trees financed by a private donor.

Related to the above is the recommendation for closer cooperation with existing civic associations and initiatives in Košice. There are several environmentally oriented civic initiatives and non-profit organisations in Košice that focus on issues such as public space, sustainable mobility and community development. The Dargovských hrdinov borough could, for example, establish partnerships with organisations and initiatives working in the areas of public space, community development and urban greenery, or with specialist departments or green space managers. Partnerships bring synergistic effects: local government provides support and legitimacy, while NGOs provide volunteer labour and often expertise. The result is projects with lower costs and a higher degree of sustainability, as the community "adopts" them. From a project practice perspective, cooperation between the public and non-profit sectors is often seen as beneficial, as it combines the institutional background of local government with active public participation.

Another area of proposals concerns specific green projects and measures that have been identified as the most necessary and feasible. These include:

- **Revitalisation of existing public spaces:** Selected areas in the housing estate (e.g. the park by the Ondava fountain, Lidické námestie and the area around the Východ health centre) can be restored relatively quickly by combining smaller investments from the municipal budget with grants. In practice, this would mean planting new trees and shrubs, adding street furniture (benches, shade structures) and creating natural features such as flower beds and rain gardens for water retention. The proposal *for a Living Park by the fountain*, which came from the residents, is exactly in this direction – it envisages moving the stage, landscaping and adding greenery. The implementation of this project could be a pilot example of a smaller climate-resilient community space. With a minimal investment (up to €10,000), the microclimate would be improved (shading, greenery reducing the temperature) and a space for outdoor community events would be created.
- **Introduction of blue-green infrastructure elements:** Several rain gardens could be created in the housing estate, following the example of the project at the Kalinovská nursery school. School grounds and inner courtyards between apartment buildings offer areas where rainwater from gutters could be directed into vegetated depressions in the ground. These measures are less costly, and for smaller projects, the costs can be in the low thousands of euros, depending on the scope and technical solution, but they significantly improve rainwater management and reduce the risk of local flooding

during storms (European Commission 2012). Similarly, so-called green roofs on selected public buildings (e.g., the local government building or cultural centre) would improve the thermal regulation of buildings and reduce the risk of heat waves (European Commission 2012). Similarly, green roofs on selected public buildings (e.g. local government offices or cultural centres) would improve the thermal regulation of buildings and retain rainwater. The borough can also encourage apartment building owners to consider greening their roofs when renovating them – at least in the form of extensive green roofs with low-maintenance vegetation (Kiss 2013). Although such projects require investment by owners, the local government can provide expert advice or help with finding subsidies from available subsidy schemes and grant calls. Figure 2 shows a green roof in Košice -Dargovskych hrdinov district.



Figure 2: Photo of a green roof on a building

Source: own processing

- **Improving the energy efficiency of public lighting and buildings:** Although this does not fall directly under "green projects" in the sense of new greenery, these are environmentally significant measures. In the housing estate, it would be beneficial to replace old sodium street lamps with modern energy-saving LED lighting, which would reduce electricity consumption and light pollution (Hrašková 2012). At the same time, a pilot project for solar public lighting is being considered in places where there is no cable network (e.g. in more remote parts of the forest park). Solar lamps with LED technology are an environmentally and economically efficient solution for public lighting in less accessible locations. Their implementation is possible through a combination of public and private funding sources. Funding could be combined – part from the borough's budget allocated for lighting renewal and part from a sponsorship contribution from the local energy company (public-private partnership model).
- **Increasing the proportion of greenery in residential areas:** The housing estate was designed with a certain proportion of grassy areas, but over time these have been

reduced in favour of parking spaces and other paved areas. One solution to combine the need for parking with the requirement for greenery is the use of permeable surfaces, such as grass-covered concrete blocks in car parks. This allows rainwater to seep through and green vegetation to grow in the gaps between the blocks. In housing estates, the pilot introduction of permeable surfaces in selected parking areas (e.g. covering an area of approximately 1,000 m²) could be considered, with the possibility of phasing the implementation into smaller units. The indicative investment costs for similar solutions are usually in the tens of euros per m², depending on the technical solution and the scope of work. At this rate, a significant part of the parking areas would be transformed into greener areas within 5 years, without the need for a large one-off expenditure. The expected benefits would be a reduction in the heat island effect (grass surfaces overheat less than asphalt) and better rainfall infiltration, which in turn helps to prevent surface runoff during storms. Figure 3 a 4 shows a rain gardens in a housing estate in Košice – Dargovských hrdinov district.



Figure 3: A rain garden in a housing estate

Source: own processing

Community and educational projects: In addition to investment projects, it is also important to work with the public in the area of environmental awareness. We therefore propose organising regular events such as *"Green Day"* – for example, spring and autumn community tree planting, forest cleaning, a competition for the most beautiful balcony or front garden in the housing estate, and so on. In 2016, Košice held a competition *for the "Most Beautiful Front Garden,"* with one of the prizes going to the Dargovských hrdinov housing estate. Reviving such competitions motivates residents to beautify their surroundings on their own initiative. The borough could symbolically reward the winners (e.g. with vouchers for garden supplies) – the costs are minimal, but the effect in the form of greener spaces is significant. It is also

appropriate to involve schools and young people: environmental education projects in primary schools, school gardens or the construction of *eco-classrooms* in nature (e.g. a gazebo in a forest park used for teaching) would connect the younger generation with the topic of environmental protection. Such activities can be financed from smaller grant schemes focused on environmental education and community projects, or from the borough's budget for education, as they also fulfil an educational function.



Figure 4: Illustrative image of a rain garden in a housing estate in Krosnianska street
Source: own processing

When designing solutions, we took into account economic feasibility – most of the projects mentioned do not exceed tens of thousands of euros, which is a level at which grants can be obtained or which the borough can gradually save up. At the same time, resources can be combined: participatory budgeting, sponsors (e.g. local companies can *adopt* a specific tree or playground), volunteer work to reduce implementation costs, etc.

The time frame and sequence of steps are equally important. We recommend that the borough establish a specific plan – for example, the *“Furča 2030 Green Concept”* – in which it sets out what it wants to achieve in the coming years (number of trees planted, area of parks restored, number of rain gardens, volume of external resources obtained). This strategic document should be developed in a participatory manner with the involvement of the public and experts and then approved by the local council. It will serve as a binding framework to ensure continuity in green projects even after political changes (e.g. replacement of the mayor or councillors). In addition, such a plan is a plus point when applying for grants – it demonstrates that the project is not an ad hoc idea, but fits into a broader development concept.

Finally, the implementation of the proposed solutions should have multiplier effects. A successfully implemented project (e.g. a revitalised park) can boost residents' confidence in further initiatives and increase their willingness to participate. Similarly, a positive example can attract support from outside sources – when a donor sees that a city district can use small

grants effectively and transparently, they may entrust it with larger funds. Ideally, the Dargovských hrdinov district could become a leader among Košice's districts in the field of environmental innovation. It is already setting an example with the introduction of participatory budgeting – Furča was one of the first districts in Košice to try it out and successfully implement projects proposed by citizens (Babušík 2023). Similarly, it could be the first housing estate to introduce rain gardens or solar lamps across the board, inspiring other local governments in Slovakia.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the financing of green projects in the Košice-Dargovských hrdinov district shows that, despite initial limitations, local authorities can find ways to get involved in the fight against climate change and improve the quality of life of residents. The analysis showed that the key to success is a combination of internal measures (better planning, gradual revitalisation of green spaces, citizen involvement) and the use of external resources (European funds, grants, partnerships). The proposals presented in the discussion – from creating partnerships with the non-profit sector, through specific projects such as rain gardens, green car parks and park restoration, to a long-term green concept – represent a comprehensive package of solutions, the implementation of which would bring tangible results in the coming years.

The implementation of the recommended projects could transform the Dargovských hrdinov housing estate into a more pleasant and resilient place to live. The expected benefits include mitigation of temperature fluctuations (more greenery and water features will help cool the microclimate in summer), reduction of noise and dust pollution, better rainwater management and, last but not least, an increase in the aesthetic and recreational value of the environment. Residents would thus gain higher-quality public spaces – parks, playgrounds, relaxation areas – which would have a positive impact on their health and community life. At the same time, the proposed measures would contribute to the achievement of broader goals: reducing the carbon footprint of the housing estate, protecting biodiversity and fulfilling the commitments of the city of Košice in the area of sustainable development.

In conclusion, the Dargovských hrdinov district illustrates a more general trend and, at the same time, a lesson for public administration: the transition to a greener economy and more resilient cities must start *from the bottom up*, at the level of communities and local governments. The findings and proposed measures are also applicable to other urban districts in Slovakia. These areas often face similar budgetary constraints, urban conditions and climate challenges. Even small projects implemented at the district level can be of great importance if they become part of a broader mosaic of environmental efforts. The successful financing and

implementation of green projects in Furča can serve as a model for other districts of Košice and other Slovak cities, showing that with sufficient will, cooperation and thoughtful use of resources, it is possible to achieve visible improvements in the environment in which we live.

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Financial Administration in the Fight Against Tax Evasion

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Abstract

Enormous amounts of tax evasion occur in European Union countries as well as in the Slovak Republic. It is therefore very important to set up a well-functioning system for the institution responsible for detecting such tax evasion. In the Slovak Republic, this is the Financial Administration, which underwent a change in its organizational structure in 2012 to bring it into line with the organizational structure of financial administrations operating in OECD countries. In practice, this means merging tax and customs offices to streamline tax registration and collection, as well as detecting tax evasion.

In this article, we look at the organizational structure of the financial administration in comparison with OECD countries, the impact of this change, and a summary in terms of making the detection of tax evasion more efficient.

Keywords: *Financial administration of the Slovak Republic, Financial administration in OECD countries, tax evasion, value added tax, tax control, detection of tax evasion*

Introduction

The existence of modern financial administration and the network of tax offices in Europe can be traced back to September 18, 1850. The current tax system began to take shape in Europe in 1927. Currently, European Union member states are creating a system of financial administration at the national level for the purpose of recording and collecting taxes. Taxes are the most important source of revenue for the state budget. The aim of this article is to highlight the importance of the effective functioning of the Slovak Financial Administration in relation to the detection of VAT tax evasion. Tax evasion causes a significant loss of revenue to the state budget in every country. Therefore, European Union countries are looking for ways to detect them. It is not possible to completely eliminate tax evasion, but it is possible to effectively detect and combat it through legislation and effective tax control. The article discusses the possibility of combating tax evasion in Slovakia by assessing the current situation and taking into account the analysis from the past period.

1 VAT and the tax gap in Slovakia and the EU

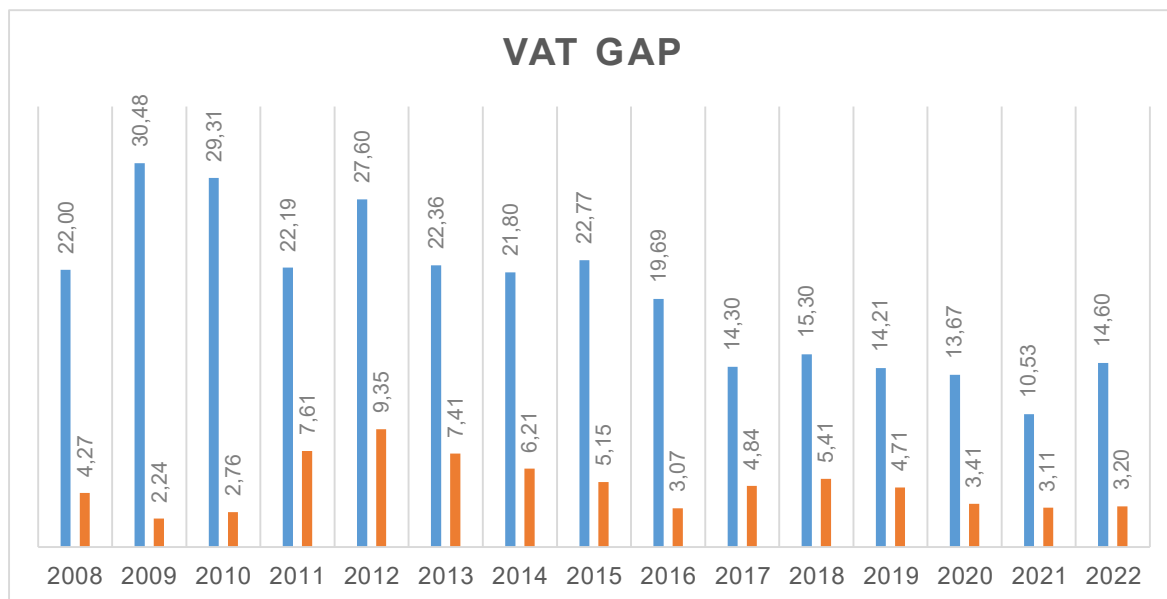
Value added tax belongs to the category of indirect taxes. VAT is based on a system of partial payments (Berger, 2011). The partial payment system means that the final amount of VAT applicable to the goods or services supplied is never paid at once, but is paid into the state budget gradually, at each stage of the production and distribution process (Beňo, 2024).

VAT in the European Union is a harmonized tax, with the legal basis for this harmonization being Article 113 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, under which Directive 2006/112/EC on VAT was adopted, which entered into force on January 1, 2007, is the main EU legislation on VAT (Schultzová, 2018). VAT rates in EU Member States vary from country to country, although they are harmonized to a certain extent within the EU (Frintrup, 2020). The VAT Act No. 222/2004 Coll. on VAT, which is currently in force in Slovakia, is in line with the European Union directive.

Based on the above information, we can see that VAT or GST exists in 170 countries around the world. For countries that have VAT or GST in their tax system, VAT revenue represents a significant amount in their national budget. Based on the results of the analysis we conducted as part of the research task IGP 1/2023 Taxation in the Context of Indirect Taxes and Tax Evasion, we found that, for example, for the country of Croatia, the state budget accounts for 37% of total revenues, Belgium and Luxembourg only 15%, and the state budget of Slovakia accounts for 21% of total state revenues (in the amount of 6,223.91 million euros). Since VAT is an indirect tax and applies to goods and services, it has an international dimension, and the practical application of the VAT mechanism therefore creates opportunities for illegal tax evasion. In 2023, VAT tax evasion in EU countries amounted to EUR 93 billion. It is therefore very important to focus on detecting illegal tax evasion in order to secure the revenue side of the state budget.

The term tax gap refers to the quantification of the extent of tax evasion. The tax gap can be divided into two parts: unidentified VAT and the collection gap. Unidentified VAT is the part of the gap that taxpayers have intentionally or unintentionally failed to declare and that has not been identified by the tax authorities during their controls. It is calculated as the difference between the potential and prescribed tax. The tax collection gap is the difference between the prescribed tax and the tax actually paid. This also includes additional tax liabilities assessed after a tax control that have not been paid.

Every year, each European Union country publishes the percentage of the VAT tax gap, including Slovakia. Chart 1 shows the development of the VAT tax gap in Slovakia from 2008 to 2022.



note: blue color VAT tax gap - unidentified gap, orange color VAT tax gap - selection gap

Figure 1: VAT gap in Slovakia

Source: based on data from Financial administration SR (Open Data).

For the period 2023, the Slovak Republic reports a VAT tax gap of 10.50% in 2024, which is at the level of 9.7%.

Quantification of the tax gap serves to identify the amount that quantifies the extent of tax evasion and serves to make the detection of tax evasion more effective.

Table 1: VAT gap in EU countries from 2021 to 2024

State of the European Union	VAT tax gap in 2021	VAT tax gap in 2022	VAT tax gap in 2023	VAT tax gap in 2024
Slovakia	11,8 %	11,50 %	10,5 %	9,7 %
Austria	3,4 %	3,0 %	1,0 %	0,6 %
Slovenia	3,2 %	8,4 %	4,9 %	4,5 %
Sweden	4,2 %	3,5 %	5,3 %	7,7 %
Romania	29,5 %	26,7 %	30,0 %	29,5 %
Portugal	3,5 %	4,1 %	3,6 %	4,6 %
Poland	4,8 %	11,2 %	16,0 %	10,9 %
Netherlands	5,8 %	9,6 %	7,0 %	7,3 %
Malta	24,4 %	23,7 %	24,20 %	22,9 %
Latvia	11,30 %	2,0 %	5,4 %	5,3 %
Luxembourg	7,4 %	3,7 %	No data available	No data available
Lithuania	13,1 %	12,2 %	15,1 %	13,2 %

Italy	15,1 %	14,5 %	15,0 %	15,3 %
Belgium	7,2 %	11,7 %	12,3 %	13,9 %
Bulgaria	3,0 %	6,3 %	8,6 %	No data available
Cyprus	10,2 %	6,3 %	3,3 %	1,7 %
Czech Republic	11,1 %	8,2 %	8,0 %	No data available
Germany	7,1 %	6,6 %	9,7 %	9,7 %
Denmark	7,4 %	7,9 %	8,9 %	8,0 %
Estónia	2,2 %	5,2 %	10,3 %	10,0 %
Spain	2,8 %	4,1 %	7,6 %	9,7 %
Finland	0,4 %	2,1 %	3,0 %	1,5 %
France	4,2 %	5,1 %	5,6 %	7,4 %
Greece	16,4 %	12,4 %	11,4 %	9,0 %
Croatia	11,6 %	11,4 %	7,7 %	9,0 %
Hungary	4,1 %	2,5 %	7,4 %	No data available
Ireland	-3,2 %	2,3 %	8,3 %	No data available

Source: European Union, 2025.

2 Organizational structure of the Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic and comparison with OECD countries

Tax evasion is undesirable in the economy of any country, which is why every country seeks ways to eliminate it (Babčák, 2019). One way to reduce tax evasion is through tax controls. A tax control is a fundamental act of tax proceedings and, for tax purposes, it means a detailed examination of accounting cases and all documents necessary to determine tax liability in terms of their authenticity, completeness, and accuracy (Burák, 2016). Tax controls may be carried out by financial administration employees (Babčák, 2012). The basic rights and obligations of taxpayers and financial administration employees, the tax control process, appeal proceedings, and enforcement proceedings are defined in the Slovak Republic in Act No. 563/2009 Coll. Tax Code, as amended (Balko, Babčák, 2009). Tax controls are carried out by tax office employees within the Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic. The financial administration in the Slovak Republic consists of the following institutions:

- a) Financial Directorate of the Slovak Republic,
- b) Tax offices (8 tax offices, 1 tax office for large taxpayers, 39 tax office branches, and 29 tax office contact points),

- c) Customs offices (9 customs offices, 62 customs office branches, and 18 customs office stations),
- d) Criminal Office of Financial Administration.

In countries around the world, each state decides on the organizational structure of its financial administration. The aim of states is to build a control system, including institutions that effectively monitor the fulfillment of tax obligations by business entities. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has been working closely for several years to modernize the tax system and combat tax evasion, so Table 2 shows the number of offices in each OECD country. This table was used to analyze the structure of the Financial Administration in the Slovak Republic.

Table 2: Comparison of the organizational and regional structure of financial administrations in the analyzed OECD countries

OECD country	Number of regional offices	Number of branches
Slovakia	18	153
Austria	5	40
Belgium	35	3153
Denmark	0	28
Estonia	0	15
Hungary	25	50
Ireland	7	75
Israel	0	80
Israel	6	67
Netherlands	14	0
Portugal	36	367
Slovenia	16	0
Spain	56	227

Source: Own processing according to www.finance.gov.sk and Kostolanský, 2000.

Table 2 shows that in the Slovak Republic, the branches of the Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic are on average smaller than abroad, but there are more of them. In the future, there are plans to digitize other services provided by the Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic, which is expected to streamline the employment of the Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic.

European Union countries and OECD member states are also striving to ensure the effective functioning of their financial administrations. The OECD's international criteria are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Current status of compliance with criteria according to OECD recommendations

Criteria according to OECD recommendations	Current status of the Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic
Have sufficient autonomy within the organizational structure of financial administration in the areas of planning, budget management, human resources management, and remuneration systems.	Partially fulfilled
Unification of the system for collecting direct taxes, indirect taxes, and social security contributions.	Not yet fulfilled
Stable legal framework for tax and customs policy.	Criterion fulfilled on an ongoing basis – implementation of the UNITAS I project
Clearly define the structure of relationships between headquarters, regional and local branches.	Partially fulfilled
Organize the internal organizational structure so that large taxpayers have a separate office.	Fulfilled – there is a Tax Office for large taxpayers

Source: own processing based on materials from the Institute for Financial Policy www.finance.gov.sk

In accordance with OECD criteria, a major reform of tax and customs administration in Slovakia was implemented on January 1, 2012, under the name UNITAS I. The changes brought about by this reform are as follows:

- a) the merger of tax and customs administration and the creation of a new system for managing and organizing the collection of state revenues through the creation of the Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic. In practice, this meant the abolition of 103 tax offices and the creation of eight new tax offices. At the same time, the tax and customs administrations were merged under the name Financial Administration, which operates as a budgetary organization. This change required the harmonization of the information technologies of the Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic, i.e., the purchase of new software to ensure the recording of data on tax entities.
- b) The Financial Administration established a call center for taxpayer inquiries (such a service did not exist until then).

- c) the electronic filing of tax and customs returns was introduced (previously, taxpayers submitted their tax returns in person or by post, and tax office employees manually entered the tax returns into the software);
- d) A database of questions and answers accessible to the public was established (until then, there was no database of questions and answers).
- e) The publication of information materials aimed at various target groups began (until then, no information materials had been published, and tax office employees were prohibited from providing expert information).

The UNITAS I reform has resulted not only in changes to the organizational structure and the digitization of communication between the Slovak Financial Administration and taxpayers, but also in a change in the approach to tax entities.

3 Detection of tax evasion

The elimination of tax evasion in the Slovak Republic is ensured by the Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic. Based on its competence, it ensures, through tax and customs offices, the control of the correctness of accounting records, as well as the control of the correctness of the calculation of individual taxes introduced in the Slovak Republic.

Since the Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic is unable to perform tax controls on every taxpayer, it is important to ensure their effectiveness, which in practice means selecting taxpayers for control where there is a high probability of detecting tax evasion. Tax evasion occurs most frequently in relation to VAT (both in Slovakia and abroad), as it is an indirect tax and is related to foreign transactions.

Table 4: Number of controls carried out and resulting findings

Year	Total number of controls	Number of tax controls focused on VAT	Findings (data in thousands of euros)
2020	10.522	5.488 (51,15 %)	387.581
2021	9.672	5.900 (61,00 %)	390.089
2022	7.291	5.280 (72,41 %)	290.328
2023	6.859	4.713 (68,71 %)	182 220
2024	7.336	4.931 (67,21 %)	169 456

Source: Authors' own processing based on the Annual Report on the Activities of the Financial Administration for 2020 to 2024

Table 4 shows that VAT controls account for a significant proportion of control activity, representing more than 50% of the total number of controls carried out. We see a slight

decrease in findings in 2024 for VAT controls. Based on the results, the most common VAT tax evasion cases are as follows:

- the VAT payer does not issue an invoice (this is undeclared value added tax),
- the VAT payer does not issue a document from the electronic cash register (this is unrecognized value added tax),
- the accounting entity issues an invoice abroad without VAT, even though the business partner abroad is no longer a VAT payer (this is non-payment of VAT),
- Chain fraud occurs when targeted re-invoicing shifts the tax liability to other entities, using different tax periods, or when a missing trader is also involved in the chain.
- Alteration of invoice amounts (in reality, the amount of the transaction is higher, but a lower amount is declared).
- multiple deduction of VAT from documents issued from an electronic cash register (information on VAT deduction is entered in the control statement in a summary amount if the VAT deduction does not exceed EUR 3,000 from one business partner).
- cash payments (where the payment was not actually made),
- invoicing between related parties, as well as failure to comply with the market price principle when invoicing.

Conclusions and recommendations

The estimated amount of tax evasion in the EU in 2023 was €6.711 trillion, with studies indicating that the largest tax evasion occurs in VAT. EU Member States have legislation in place at the national level, but the laws are harmonized with EU legislation. Therefore, the EU recommends that individual states combat tax evasion. For the Slovak Republic, in terms of legislation, this meant changing the organizational structure of the financial administration and introducing electronic communication. Further recommendations are as follows:

- monitor the behavior of the business environment in relation to the fulfillment of tax obligations. So far, once a year monitoring is not sufficient, so we recommend monitoring twice a year. At the same time, issue a list of tax entities that appear to be non-risky. The Financial Administration would be the one to carry out the action, which has all the possibilities. The estimate of detection in this case is difficult to quantify, because it is difficult to predict the behavior of tax entities.
- identify tax entities that pose a risk of tax evasion. As the number of risky tax entities increases every year, this identification follows on from the first recommendation.
- after identifying risky taxpayers, initiate a tax control after conducting a local investigation if there is 100% certainty of tax evasion. With the rapid deployment of tax

controls, it will be possible to capture a larger amount of evasion funds in a short time, which will mean savings for the state budget.

- during the tax control, secure existing assets on the basis of a preliminary measure decision (which in practice means a ban on the sale of assets until the tax arrears have been paid after the tax control). To demand immediate payment of the determined amount to the state budget, which again means an increase in revenue from risky tax entities to the state budget.

It is difficult to quantify the direct impact of these measures on the state budget, as currently tax entities are rapidly emerging and rapidly disappearing due to turbulent tax laws.

The fight against VAT tax evasion in Slovakia continues, with the introduction of mandatory control and summary reporting for businesses. These mechanisms have helped to carry out targeted tax controls, which have increased the effectiveness of the financial administration, although further measures need to be introduced to successfully detect tax evasion.

Based on the recommendations of the European Commission, from January 1, 2027, every VAT payer registered in Slovakia will be required to issue invoices in electronic form via the information system of the Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic. This measure ensures compliance with the Accounting Act, according to which an invoice must be issued within 15 days of the taxable supply, and at the same time prevents tax evasion or speculation in the area of invoicing and VAT refunds. This system has been implemented in Hungary, for example, and has had positive effects in detecting tax evasion.

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Heterogeneity of Shared Micromobility Utilization Throughout a Day: A Case Study for the City of Košice

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Abstract

This study examines spatiotemporal utilisation patterns of shared e-scooter users in Košice, Slovakia, analysing 403,683 trips recorded between 2021–2023 by Antik, a major micromobility operator. Using K-means clustering and density analysis, we identified three distinct spatial clusters corresponding to urban topology, with trips predominantly serving intra-district and district-to-centre functions (average distances 1,071–1,275 m). Temporal analysis revealed pronounced diurnal variation: early morning trips (3.93%) were longest (1,315 m), indicating supplementary first/last-mile functions during low public transit availability, while afternoon peaks (38.74%) concentrated in central districts. Critically, vehicle redistribution during night hours created dispersed morning availability, but progressive afternoon-evening concentration in central hubs and transit transfer points reduced peripheral access. These findings demonstrate that urban topology fundamentally shapes trip patterns, while operational rebalancing creates temporal inequity. The study provides empirical foundations for evidence-based fleet management strategies, public transit integration, and policy frameworks preventing regulatory crises observed in Paris and Prague.

Keywords: micromobility, shared transportation systems, utilisation patterns, urban mobility

Introduction

Shared electric scooters have transformed urban mobility across Europe since their introduction in major cities around 2018, offering a flexible, cost-effective solution for short-distance trips within densely populated areas (EIT Urban Mobility, 2021). From Paris to Copenhagen to eastern cities, these mostly dockless micromobility vehicles have become an addition to existing shared mobility systems implemented in modern urban transport, yet they simultaneously represent one of the most contested transport innovations of the past decade (EIT Urban Mobility, 2021). Košice, Slovakia's second-largest city, has not been exempt from this global trend—the entry of Antik's e-scooter system into the city has introduced both opportunities and challenges that demand careful, evidence-based understanding of sustainable urban mobility planning.

1 E-scooters as a shared service

E-scooters to addition to bicycles - their unpowered cousins- promise significant advantages for urban mobility. They provide rapid, accessible transport for short-distance trips—typically under 2 kilometres—filling a critical mobility gap often named as the "first-mile" and "last-mile" problem, especially when integrated with public transport networks (European Commission, 2021; Mulasi, 2024).

In cities like Košice, where residents face substantial traffic congestion, e-scooters offer an environmentally friendly alternative that reduces reliance on private automobiles (Košice City Council, 2022) or play the role of public transportation feeder. The vehicles themselves are highly space-efficient: a single car parking bay can accommodate up to 20 e-scooters, making them an attractive tool for reclaiming urban space from motor vehicles (EIT Urban Mobility, 2021).

In Slovakia several shared mobility service providers operate with Bolt being the largest among them with their e-scooter service provided in 17 cities, followed by Tier in Bratislava the capital city and Antik in Košice the second biggest city in the country. Beyond congestion relief being the main benefit of the shared services is the utilisation of shared e-scooters align with European sustainability objectives, related to climate goals. Micromobility can contribute to climate goals—reducing greenhouse gas emissions, decreasing air pollution, and promoting active travel that benefits public health (EIT Urban Mobility, 2021). Shared e-scooters, when properly implemented, represent an effective tool for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in urban transport. A study of the Voi e-scooter system in Bristol demonstrated that in 2021, it replaced 48,000 km of motorized transport and reduced CO₂ emissions by up to 45% compared to substituted trips (Chaniotakis et al., 2023). Another study of shared micromobility across six global cities (Berlin, Düsseldorf, Paris, Stockholm, Melbourne, Seattle) found that shared e-scooters reduced emissions by 14.8–42.4 g CO₂e/pkm compared to replaced modes, with monthly city-level savings ranging from 3.9 to 66.1 tons CO₂ (Krauss, Doll & Thigpen, 2022). The largest reductions came from replacing ridehailing (-541 g CO₂e/trip) and private ICE cars (-273 g CO₂e/trip). However, when replacing walking or public transit, net emissions increased by up to +110 g CO₂e/trip, highlighting the importance of mode substitution patterns. Also as noted by researchers such as Saltykova et al. (2022), if e-scooters replace public transport (buses, metro) rather than private cars, the environmental benefits are significantly lower—in scenarios with short vehicle lifespans (under 3,500 km) or high operational costs, the net effect may even be negative (Chaniotakis et al., 2023).

Shared e-scooters can improve accessibility for residents unable to afford private vehicles and address the "first/last mile" problem in multimodal transport. This can mitigate issues of high car ownership and limited parking (Bai & Jiao, 2020). Studies in Austin and

Minneapolis showed e-scooters connect peripheral areas to transit stops, enhancing access in underserved neighbourhoods (Bai & Jiao, 2020).

Research shows e-scooter sharing users are typically men with higher education and income (Sanders et al., 2020; Reck et al., 2021). 60–70% of users are men compared to women, reflecting barriers of safety and infrastructure (Verloes et al., 2022). This highlights the need for inclusive infrastructure planning.

However, the rise of e-scooters has not been uniformly celebrated. Rapid, unregulated proliferation across European cities created chaos, with scooters blocking sidewalks and sparking public backlash (EIT Urban Mobility, 2021). Paris banned them after a 2023 referendum (90% voter support) following fleet chaos with multiple operators (BBC News, 2023). Prague announced a full ban citing persistent safety hazards and sidewalk clutter (European Urban Mobility Observatory, 2025). Copenhagen temporarily banned e-scooters in 2021 before reintroducing strict regulations limiting fleets to 3,200 vehicles across four operators. Understanding user behavioural patterns of shared e-scooters is critical for their sustainable integration into urban transport systems, particularly given the regulatory crises observed in European cities such as Paris and Prague. Unlike bikesharing systems with relatively predictable trip patterns, shared e-scooters generate unpredictable spatial flows characterized by high central district concentrations, sidewalk clutter, and hazardous riding behaviours—factors that critically determine net emissions impacts, with mode substitution patterns, emphasizing sensitivity to behavioural factors.

For the city of Košice—where the 2022 Update of the Strategy for Transport Development identifies micromobility (previously Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan) as essential for mitigating urban congestion—localized behavioural analysis is essential. The city's specific context (62% private car ownership, narrow historic core, and critical commuting corridor between the main railway station and Technical University campuses) requires data-driven fleet zoning, transit-integrated parking hubs at DPMK stations, and equity interventions (student pricing schemes, women-targeted safety initiatives) to achieve sustainable outcomes. Without empirical understanding of Košice's e-scooter user behavioural patterns, the city risks replicating regulatory failures observed in Paris and Prague rather than adopting the evidence-based Copenhagen model (3,200 vehicle fleet, four authorized operators, designated parking zones). This study therefore examines the behavioural characteristics and mode substitution patterns of e-scooter users in Košice to provide an empirical foundation for sustainable and equitable micromobility governance.

2 Utilization Pattern Analysis of Shared E-Scooter Users

Behavioural assessments of shared micromobility systems have evolved from basic demographic profiling toward integrated spatial-temporal analyses, though e-scooter research remains substantially less developed than bikesharing literature. Christoforou et al. (2021) conducted foundational analysis of Paris e-scooter users, establishing demographic baselines and revealing preference patterns. Bai and Jiao (2020) employed regression analysis to demonstrate that e-scooters concentrate in short-distance trips within central business districts and near universities. Building on bikesharing spatial research, Mahajan et al. (2024) applied clustering analysis to identify demand concentrations in densely populated areas across 40 global cities. Schimohr and Scheiner (2021) validated spatial relationships between infrastructure and public transit, showing that proximity to universities, restaurants, and shops positively influences usage.

Temporal patterns reveal purpose-driven behavioural differences. Kim (2023) differentiated between long-term subscription patterns (commuting-focused) and short-term casual use (leisure-oriented), establishing that commuting trips exhibit morning (7:00–9:00) and evening (17:00–19:00) peaks. Qin et al. (2023) identified divergent patterns between trip volume, duration, and spatial distribution, with weekend usage concentrating near recreational infrastructure. Critically, Chaniotakis, Johnson, and Kamargianni (2023) advanced temporal-behavioural integration through analysis of 190,932 Bristol e-scooter trips, documenting afternoon usage peaks aligned with rush hours alongside distance distributions (mean 2.1 km) and mode substitution variance (37% walking, 19% car), establishing that temporal patterns fundamentally determine net emissions outcomes.

Spatial-temporal segmentation enables predictive urban planning. Lee and Leung (2023) applied Dynamic Time Warping clustering to analyse demand relationships with neighbourhood characteristics, advancing beyond static spatial approaches. Cantelmo et al. (2020, 2019) proposed integrated models combining quantitative clustering with spatial dimensions. Chen et al. (2022) utilized bikeshare networks to identify urban zone boundaries, while Moore et al. (2023) applied k-means clustering to classify areas as "Central Urban Hub," "Dense Residential," "Connected Outskirts," and "Disconnected Suburbs". Yang et al. (2025) advanced prediction to operational scales through BikeMAN, a multi-level spatio-temporal neural network validated on 10+ million trips, yet such sophisticated modelling remains absent for e-scooter behavioural analysis.

Research gaps persist in Central European contexts. Reck et al. (2022) developed mixed logit models integrating revealed preference data with lifecycle assessment, establishing methodological frameworks. However, research remains concentrated in megacities, while Central Europe, including Slovakia, remains understudied. Gender-equity

research by Verloes et al. (2022) documented persistent male-dominated adoption (60–70%) and identified safety and infrastructure barriers—yet few studies link behavioural insights to proactive regulatory design or test whether data-driven interventions prevent governance failures as observed in Paris and Prague. This analytical gap motivates the present Košice-focused investigation, integrating spatial clustering, temporal segmentation, to evidence-based grounds for governance and future spatial analysis.

3 Data and Methodology

The analysis is based on shared e-scooter trip data provided by Antik, one of the operators of shared micromobility systems within the city of Košice. These data comprise records of e-scooter trips for the years 2021, 2022, and 2023, with a total of 403683 records available. The data was processed utilizing the R software, with visualizations compiled using ggplot2 and OpenStreetMap packages based on OSM map data.

The data provided by Antik contained the following information:

- Time when the trip was started, rounded to the nearest hour.
- Latitude of the trip origin.
- Longitude of the trip origin.
- Address of the trip origin.
- Latitude of the trip destination.
- Longitude of the trip destination.
- Address of the trip destination.

Cluster analysis was performed using the K-means approach, with the optimal number of clusters determined by the elbow method using the factoextra package in R. Density analysis and plots were constructed using the stat_density series of functions from the ggplot2 package. Straight-line distances for trips were calculated from the start and end point coordinates using the geodist package.

The main limitations of this study arise from the availability and structure of the underlying data. First, the dataset did not include exact trip dates, only start times rounded to the nearest hour, which precluded a seasonal or day-of-week analysis of e-scooter usage patterns. Second, trip length was approximated using straight-line (Euclidean) distances between origin and destination coordinates, ignoring the actual routes followed along the street network and the influence of topography or infrastructure constraints. This simplification may underestimate effective travel distances, particularly in areas with indirect connectivity. A promising avenue for future research is the integration of public transport data—specifically

the spatial distribution of bus and tram stops—and the use of network-based trip distances when identifying utilization clusters. Such an extension would enable a more precise assessment of first-/last-mile functions and the interplay between micromobility and public transport in Košice.

4 Analysis and results

The shared micromobility system operates on a free flow basis, where the vehicles can be freely picked up from their current location and upon ending a trip, can be parked without restrictions, provided they are not blocking traffic or pedestrian movement. The vehicles are then regularly collected by the operator, especially from remote locations, and are redistributed to high demand areas in the city as needed. This can be seen on figure 1, which depicts a sample of the trip start and end points. Due to the size of the dataset, only 5% of all trips are depicted in the figure (20184 trips). As can be seen, many trip ends are located in remote areas or on the outskirts of the city, where they are then collected from, and only a limited number of trips actually start in these areas.

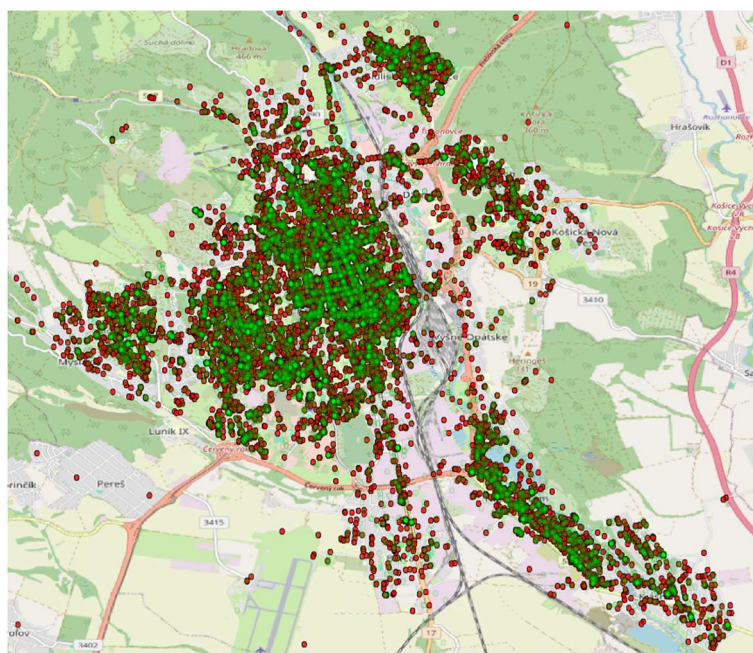


Figure 1: Sample (5%) of trip start (green) and end (red) locations

To analyse the spatial distribution of trips taken, a cluster analysis was conducted using the start and end point locations of the trips, to identify trips with similar origin and destination points. Visualization of the resulting clusters is presented in figure 2, with a 5% sample of all available trips is depicted in the figure for clarity.

The clusters represent separate groups of trips, which largely correspond to the topographical features of the city. Cluster 1, outlined in black, covers the city centre, located on a lowland, and the western part of the city, comprised of city districts located above the city centre on hillsides surrounding the city from the west. Cluster 3, outlined in red, covers the city districts located to the east and north in a similar fashion, with these districts also located in hilly areas. Both of these clusters overlap in the city centre, meaning they are comprised of trips to the city centre from the outlying districts and back, with only minimal travel across the centre to other districts. This can be also seen reflected in the average trip distance, measured as the straight-line distance from the origin to the destination points of each trip, which has been calculated using the geodist package. The distances are presented in table 1, with an average of 1275.005 meters and 1070.837 meters for cluster 1 and 3 respectively. These distances roughly correspond to the straight-line distance of the boundaries of the districts covered by these clusters to the city centre (ranging between 800m up to 1500m for most districts). This would also suggest that many trips are taken within the districts themselves, as they are shorter than these distances. Since the distances between districts covered by cluster 1 and 3 mostly exceed 2500m, this would confirm that the trips are not taken across the centre in most of the cases.

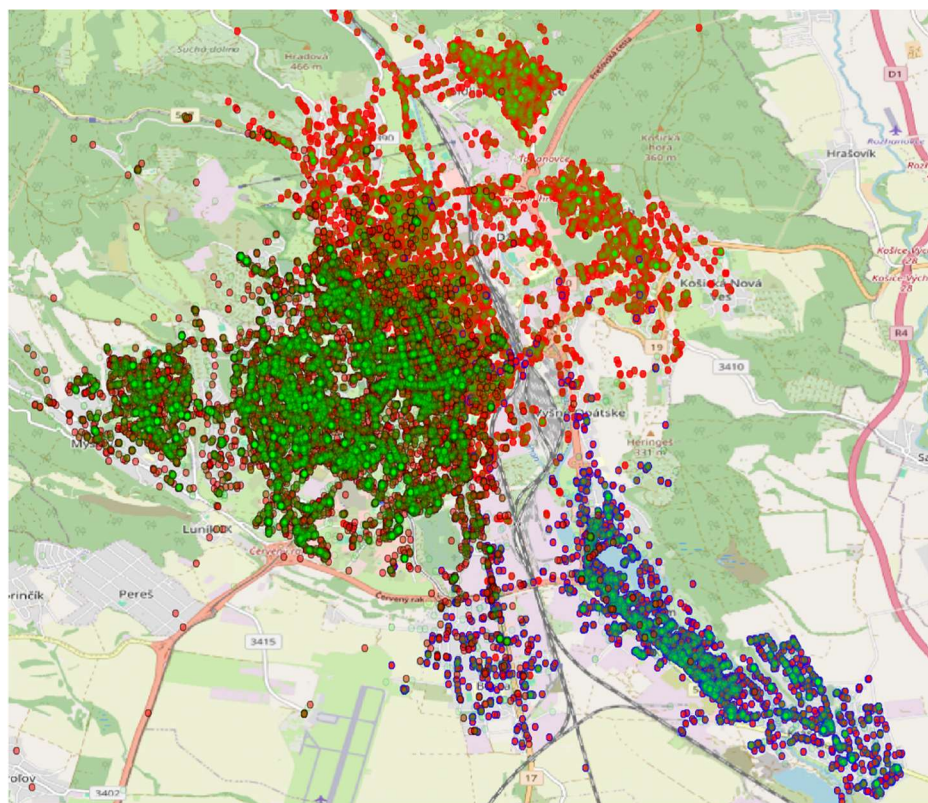


Figure 2: Clusters of similar origin-destination trips. Clusters denoted by outline colour (1 black, 2 blue, 3 red). Fill colour denotes trip start (green) and end (red) points. Sample of trips (5%) visualized per cluster.

Cluster 2 represents a special case, covering the south-east part of the city, which is largely separated from the city centre by a large predominantly industrial zone, meaning trips have to be taken over longer distances, increasing costs for such trips. Most of these trips in this cluster rather originate or end near public transport transfer points, meaning that micromobility is either used for inter-district travel or as a part of a combined travel solution.

Table 1: Statistics for trip clusters

Cluster	No. Trips	% of Trips	Average Length (m)	Median Length (m)
1	171366	42.42%	1275.005	1068.096
2	64652	16.02%	1141.549	747.676
3	167665	41.57%	1070.837	796.45

Source: own calculations

Since user behaviour and utilization patterns can vary across a single day, respecting typical travel behaviour patterns, the data was separated into distinct time slots, presented in table 2.

Table 2: Trip statistics for selected time windows during the day

Time of start	No. Trips	% of Trips	Average Length (m)	Median Length (m)
0:00 - 6:00	15853	3.93%	1315.076	1015.444
6:00 – 10:00	57661	14.28%	1295.011	1039.156
10:00 – 14:00	85408	21.16%	1142.582	870.2651
14:00 – 19:00	156380	38.74%	1152.333	865.8759
19:00 – 0:00	88381	21.89%	1114.844	838.124

Source: own calculations

The number of trips is the lowest for the first time windows, which represents early morning hours, when micromobility is often used to supplement the low number of public transport options available at night, when most bus and tram lines in the city operate at a reduced level, or not at all. The trips taken in this time windows are also the longest on average. The second time window, between 6:00 and 10:00 represents the morning rush hour, with a much higher level of utilization. Notably however, the level of utilization is the highest in the afternoon rush hour time windows between 14:00 and 19:00. The midday and evening time windows have a comparably high level of utilization as well. Overall, micromobility in the city

has the highest level of utilization from the midday onwards, with trip length becoming shorter as the day goes on. What is notable however, is that the geographical utilization patterns described earlier hold up throughout the day, with cluster analysis results for the first three time windows (morning rush hour, midday and afternoon rush hour) visualised in figure 3. The results remain the same for the remaining two time windows. This would mean, that overall trip spatial similarity remains consistent throughout the day, irrespective of different character and reasons for individual trips, that can be expected at different times of the day. Rather, the inter-district or district-centre spatial character of most trips is mostly determined by the topology of the city.

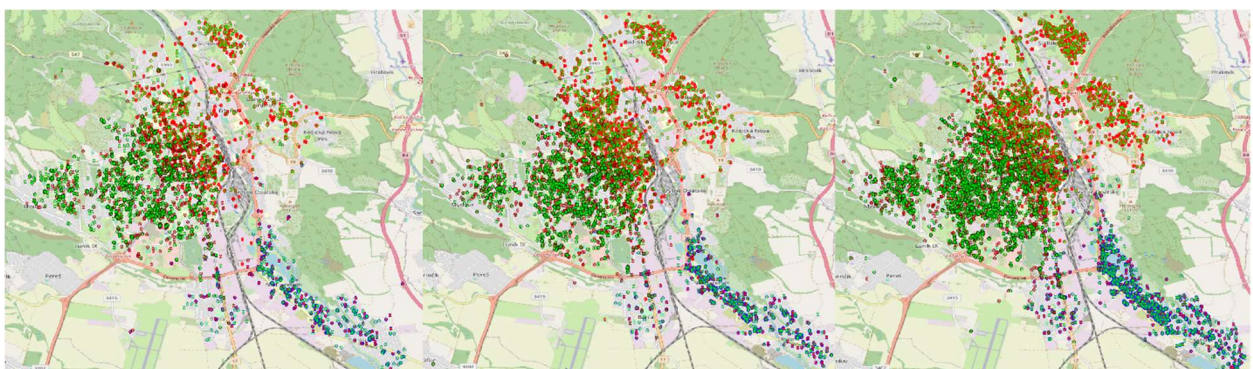


Figure 3: Clusters of similar origin-destination trips for morning rush hour (left), midday (middle) and afternoon rush hour (right). Clusters denoted by outline colour (1 black, 2 blue, 3 red). Fill colour denotes trip start (green) and end (red) points. Sample of trips (5%) visualized per cluster.

What can change throughout the day, however, is the distribution of trip starts, ends and the orientation of trips. For this reason, density plots were constructed for trip start and end points for the different time windows.

Figure 4 depicts the density plot for start and end points for the morning and afternoon rush hours, as well as for the midday time windows. There are notable differences between these time windows. During the morning rush hour, the distribution of start points is more widely spread throughout the city districts, as people utilize micromobility to travel from their residences to possible places of work or study. The end points of these trips are then more densely situated in the city centre and around known public transport transfer points. During the midday, trip start and end points are both more densely condensed in the city centre, suggesting shorter trips between various points of interest and possible transport transfer locations. This condensation trend further continues into the afternoon rush hour, with even more pronounced concentration of trip start and end points at known transport hubs. One possible explanation of this, is that while e-scooters are distributed by the operator during the

night, they continue to concentrate at high traffic areas as the day goes on, becoming less available at city and district outskirts.

Figure 5 depicts the same density plots, but this time for the early morning and evening time windows. In the morning, most trips originate in the city centre, with destinations being widely spread throughout the entire city, suggesting that micromobility is widely used during this time window for return trips from the city back to personal residences.

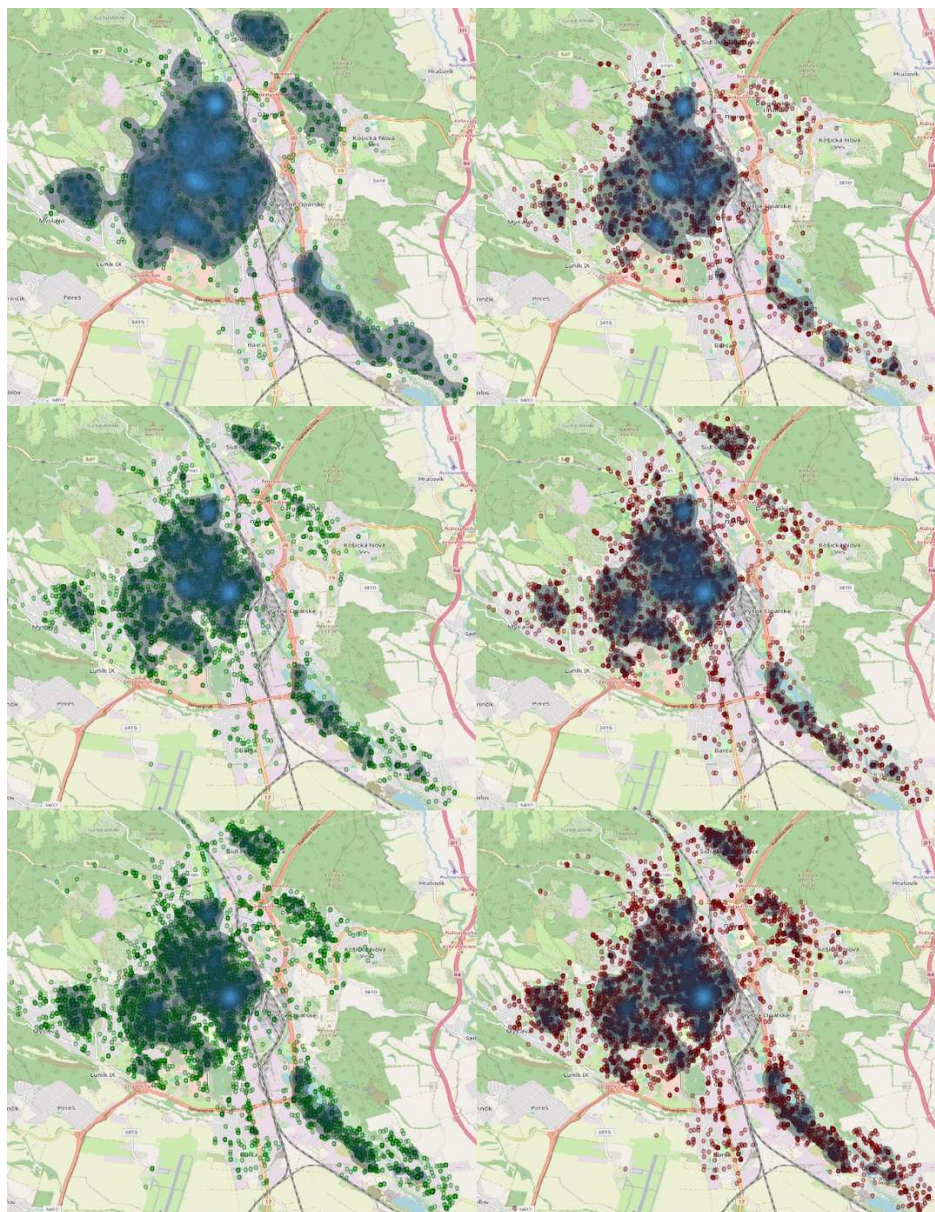


Figure 4: Density plots of trip start (green) and end (red) points for morning rush hour (top row), midday (middle row) and afternoon rush hour (bottom row). Sample of trips (5%) visualized per plot.

Similar trend is observable during the evening hours, but to a much less pronounced extent, again suggesting a possible daily cycle of shared micromobility availability, where the

operators distribute e-scooters during the night, as well as some of them becoming available in more remote locations naturally by being used to travel to outlying parts of the city during the night, when public transport availability is limited, and becoming more concentrated at points of interest or transport hubs as the day goes on.

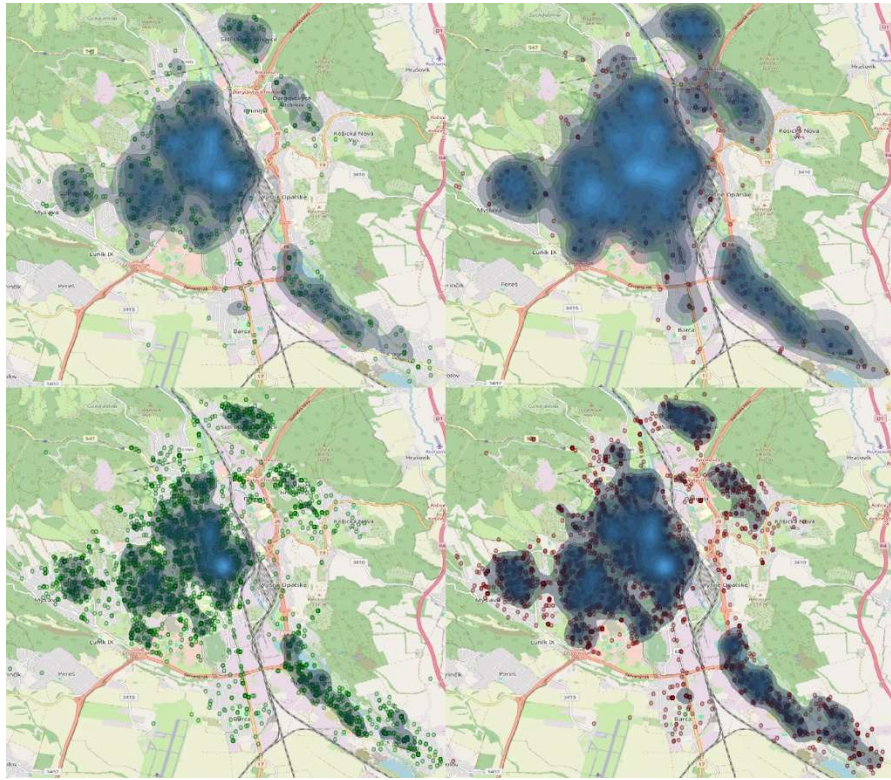


Figure 5: Density plots of trip start (green) and end (red) points for early morning (top row) and evening (bottom row). Sample of trips (5%) visualized per plot.

Conclusion

This spatiotemporal analysis of 403,683 e-scooter trips in Košice reveals critical insights into the behavioural patterns and spatial-temporal dynamics of shared micromobility systems in a Central European mid-sized city. The investigation identified three distinct spatial clusters corresponding to topographical features: Cluster 1 (42.42% of trips, 1,275 m average distance) connecting western districts to the city centre; Cluster 3 (41.57% of trips, 1,071 m average distance) serving eastern and northern districts; and Cluster 2 (16.02% of trips, 1,142 m average distance) representing isolated southeastern areas dependent on longer-distance connections. Critically, these spatial patterns remained remarkably consistent across all temporal segments, indicating that urban topology, rather than trip purpose, is the primary determinant of origin-destination behaviour.

Temporal analysis revealed pronounced temporal variation in utilization intensity and spatial distribution. Early morning hours (0:00–6:00) exhibited the lowest usage (3.93%) but longest average trip distances (1,315 m), indicating supplementary first/last-mile functions during reduced public transit availability. Morning commute hours (6:00–10:00) showed increased activity (14.28%), while peak utilization occurred during afternoon hours (14:00–19:00, 38.74% of trips). Notably, trip length decreased throughout the day (1,295 m to 1,115 m), suggesting progressive concentration of vehicles in central districts and transport hubs. Density analysis documented a critical operational dynamic: vehicle redistribution during night hours resulted in dispersed morning start points, but afternoon and evening peaks showed pronounced clustering around central locations and public transit transfer points, indicating diminishing availability in peripheral districts as the day progressed.

These findings hold substantial implications for multiple stakeholders. For policymakers, the data demonstrate that micromobility integration with public transport operates at distinct temporal scales—morning peaks reflect residential-to-centre commuting patterns, while afternoon peaks indicate secondary mobility for intra-centre trips and transit connections. This time-differentiated relationship suggests targeted transit coordination opportunities. For the service operator, the analysis reveals a structural challenge: current night-time redistribution strategies insufficient to maintain equitable availability throughout the day. Vehicle concentration intensifies from midday onward, particularly around central hubs, while peripheral districts progressively lose access—a pattern that may exacerbate equity barriers and limit adoption among non-central populations.

This study provides empirical foundations for future research directions: longitudinal analysis tracking seasonal variation, correlation of trip patterns with public transit schedules and demand, and integration of mode-choice data to assess substitution effects on emissions and congestion. Additionally, operational simulation modelling could test alternative redistribution strategies to address the identified concentration problem. For Košice specifically, these findings underscore the necessity of proactive fleet management—particularly mid-day rebalancing to outlying districts—to prevent the regulatory crises observed in Paris and Prague, and to achieve the equitable, multimodal transport objectives outlined in the city's Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan.

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REVIEW

The Historical Constitution (...) Has Transformed into Legal History

Unpublished works of legal scholars on Hungary's historical constitution and constitutional history

Schweitzer Gábor, Szente Zoltán

The book presents a selection of unpublished works of some Hungarian legal scholars on Hungary's historical constitution and constitutional history. Before each text, readers will find an introductory study that provides the context of the original authors' writings or notes from university/legal academy lectures, along with a brief professional biography of the authors, highlighting the most important content elements, characteristics, and innovations of the sources. The largely unknown, previously hidden sources presented here can make an important contribution to the understanding of the historical constitution and are an indispensable work for specialists dealing with the constitutional and legal history of Hungary.

The authors featured in the volume had the decisive part of their careers in the last third of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, although most of them also lived through the communist takeover of power. They belonged to the important lawyers and scholars of the interwar period, but there were also those careers were already past their peak or whose significant careers only awaited them after World War II.

Ödön Polner (1865-1961) belonged to the first category; during World War I, he was already the rector of the newly founded Royal Elizabeth University in Bratislava and previously had a substantial administrative career. Conversely, Andor Csizmadia's (1910-1985) academic career mainly took off after World War II during the communist regime. József Barabási Kun (1875-1946), Vilmos Szontagh (1885-1962) and István Egyed (1886-1966), like Polner, belonged to that group of scientifically active lawyers, who first gained work experience in public administration and then built their academic careers. (From an Eastern Slovak perspective, it is interesting that during the First World War, Szontagh was briefly the elected mayor of the town of Jelšava.)

Among the selected group of authors, several other similarities also emerged. One of these was their fundamentally national conservative or liberal-conservative political orientation. Many of them moved comfortably within various fields of public law, and this was not related only to constitutional law and administrative law. The consequent political legitimist (supporter of the Habsburg restoration) Kálmán Molnár (1881-1961), for example, at one time taught canon law so that, as a public lawyer, he would not have to teach the law and institutions of the system established in the 1920s. He also taught Hungarian public law to Otto von Habsburg, who was already living in exile. László Búza (1885-1969), on the other hand, entered Hungarian legal memory more as an international lawyer.

Perhaps the most internationally well-known lawyer was István Csekey (1889-1963), who taught at the University of Tartu (Estonia) during the interwar period. In addition to Western Europe, he was also well acquainted with example of Finland. Csekey was thus active as a legal comparativist. Later, from the third decade of the 20th century he worked in Hungary. The mentioned professors taught at various law academies, and several of them ended their teaching careers as university professors at the Faculty of Law in Budapest. After all, it was the most prestigious institution in Hungary.

The texts of the professors reviewed in the book dealt with topics that defined professional discourse between 1920 and 1949. Thus, besides the nature of the Hungarian constitution, it also addressed issues such as the form of the state, the legal status of the interim head of state, the Doctrine of the Holy Crown, legal continuity, and previous issues such as the nature of the former monarchy, etc.

The concept and content of the historical constitution, as well as the temporal limits of the entire construct, became particularly interesting to Hungarian constitutional lawyers again after the adoption of the new Fundamental Law in 2011. The preamble of the Fundamental Law, in fact, mentioned the unwritten Hungarian historical constitution in several places, which had shaped Hungary's legal and political life until 1945. However, in 1945 a new era began, and the parliament elected at that time adopted Act I on the proclamation of the Hungarian Republic in February 1946. This was not simply a declaration and a change of state form, but the mentioned act also served for a few years as a provisional small constitution.

After the Fundamental Law introduced the concept of the achievements of the historical constitution, currently not only the Hungarian Constitutional Court but also the legal profession is trying to clarify this concept, as these achievements must also be considered in interpreting the constitution and resolving constitutional conflicts. This has led to a serious increase of interest in Hungarian constitutional history among public lawyers dealing with current law. This demand was reflected by the two renowned Hungarian constitutional lawyers and legal historians Gábor Schweitzer and Zoltán Szente, who compiled and edited the reviewed volume. Both belong to the more cautious experts in the field, meaning they do not advocate for an overly broad interpretation of the historical constitution or romantic legal excursions into the feudal era. They start from the assumption that it only makes sense to speak of a modern constitution from the late 18th century onwards. Their conceptual attitude towards the continuation of the historical constitution is largely revealed by the title of the book, which they borrowed from one text of professor Vilmos Szontagh from 1947: „The historical constitution (...) has transformed into legal history.”

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Schweitzer Gábor, Szenté Zoltán

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Unpublished works of legal scholars on Hungary's historical constitution and constitutional history

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Environmental Justice in the Context of Social Work

León Richvalský, Jana Levická

The scholarly monograph *Environmental Justice in the Context of Social Work* represents a timely and highly significant contribution to the discussion on the interconnection between environmental issues and social work. The authors—León Richvalský and Jana Levická—respond to the global environmental crisis and its social consequences, which increasingly affect socially vulnerable groups of the population. The publication is the outcome of a long-term research project and thus reflects not only theoretical foundations but also extensive research findings from the context of the Slovak Republic.

The aim of the monograph is to identify the impacts of environmental burdens on the everyday lives of residents of communities located in their vicinity, while also identifying factors and strategies that may contribute to the elimination of these negative effects. The authors emphasize that the environmental crisis is not only an ecological issue but also a social problem that deepens existing inequalities and injustices. The publication is intended primarily for professionals and students of social work; however, its thematic focus extends beyond the boundaries of a single discipline and may also be of value to scholars in the fields of sociology, environmental studies, and public policy. The monograph is structured into several logically interconnected chapters that gradually move from theoretical foundations to research findings and the conclusions of the study.

In the first chapter, the authors focus on the concept of environmental justice itself. They outline the historical development of social work's engagement with environmental issues and highlight a gradual shift from the individualization of responsibility for living conditions toward a systemic and structural understanding of environmental risks. The chapter elaborates on the interconnection between social work and four key areas: social justice, the right to a healthy environment, the risks of the environmental crisis, and sustainability. Within the Slovak context, the authors identify a low level of implementation of environmental social work in education and professional practice.

The second chapter focuses on ecological burdens in Slovakia. Through concrete examples, the authors document the scope and severity of environmental problems caused primarily by industrial and mining activities. The chapter is complemented by maps and photographic materials, which significantly enhance its explanatory value and enable the reader to better understand the real impacts of ecological burdens on the lives of local residents.

In the third chapter, the focus shifts to environmental issues in marginalized Roma communities (MRK). The authors analyze selected localities and highlight the connection

between environmental degradation and social exclusion, poverty, and limited access to basic resources such as drinking water, sanitary conditions, and safe housing. The chapter demonstrates that environmental injustice often has both an ethnic and social dimension.

The fourth chapter addresses the environmental issue in the context of the strategic document *Action Plan within the Strategy for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation of Roma until 2030 for the years 2025–2027*. The authors analyze the extent to which this document reflects the environmental aspects of life in marginalized communities and its potential to improve their living conditions.

The fifth chapter focuses on the concept of sustainability, which the authors understand as an essential framework for the future development of social work. Sustainability is presented not merely as an ecological objective but as a comprehensive process requiring the collaboration of individuals, communities, institutions, and public administration.

In the concluding chapter, the authors summarize the main research findings and emphasize the need for a more systematic involvement of social work in addressing environmental issues. They stress that without trained professionals and without linking theory, research, and practice, it will not be possible to adequately respond to the consequences of the environmental crisis.

The monograph *Environmental Justice in the Context of Social Work* represents a comprehensive and socially relevant work. Its strength lies in the integration of theoretical concepts with research data and its focus on specific Slovak realities. The publication makes a significant contribution to the development of environmental social work and opens avenues for further research and professional discussion.

Information about the publication:

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Peter Dubóczy	6

E	
Gabriel Eštok	6

G	
Lucia Grosošová	75
Marek Gróf	103

H	
Ivan Halász	67, 119

J	
Michal Jesenko	49

K	
Martina Kantorová	49

P	
Vadym Pryimachuk	49

S	
Andrea Seňová	75
Sergej Sinicyn	6

Š	
Nora Štangová	93
Tomáš Štuller	122

T	
Ivana Tkáčová	75

V	
Agneša Víghová	93

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