

Social Capital and Religion in Slovakia

Its Perspective for Symbiosis between Slovakia and Hungary

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This paper will discuss the relationship between social capital and religion in Slovakia relying on the major social research data. It intends to form a working hypothesis for research about the religious factor in the symbiosis of the border region between Slovakia and Hungary.

Both social capital and religion have come to attention as a factor complementing or efficiently operating the public institutions and civil society. The idea of social capital has been widely discussed by political scientists and sociologists, and, in recent decades, it has growing emphasis in the debate of policy-making.¹ It is argued that social capital has an influence on good economic activity, efficiency of government, stability of local society, and could help welfare service, education etc. to function.

The role of religion has also been reassessed. As a swingback to the secularizing world, a trend of ‘de-privatization’ of religions

¹ Considerable numbers of studies have been made on social capital especially over the past few decades. On the review of the literature on Central and Eastern European social capital, see Mihaylova Dimitrina, *Social capital in Central and Eastern Europe: A critical assessment and literature review*, Budapest, 2004.

has been witnessed all over the world.² Although religious revival sometimes clashes with the norm of separation between religion and politics or becomes a seed of disputes and conflicts, the positive role of religion in civil society has been revealed. In the debate of ‘public religions’, revitalized churches are assigned a certain role in the public sphere, such as health and elderly care, education, settlement work, and many other civic activities. It has been argued that religion is closely related with social capital especially in the United States and in Europe where research has well been accumulated. Some research analyses the links between the indicators of social capital and religion, and try to map the ‘religious social capital’ of Christian Europe and US regions.³

As regards the post socialist Eastern and Central European countries, the positive influence of religion toward the democratization process and the role of social capital in economic development have been discussed, but little is revealed about the relation between religion and social capital.⁴ Hence, it is not surprising that the religious factor has been regarded by far not the central issue of relationship between neighboring countries in this region. However, taking the deep-rooted influence of Christian churches in Slovakia

2 José Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world*, University of Chicago Press, 1994.

3 Gert Pickel, Anja Gladkich, ‘Religious social capital in Europe: Connections between religiosity and civil society,’ in Gert Pickel, Kornelia Sammet eds., *Transformations of religiosity: Religion and religiosity in Eastern Europe 1989-2010*, Wiesbaden, 2012, 69-94; Igor Bahovec, Vinko Potočnik, Siniša Zrinščak, ‘Religion and social capital : the diversity of European regions’, in Frane Adam ed., *Social capital and governance : Old and new members of the EU in comparison*, Münster, 2007, 175-200; Loek Halman, Thorleif Petersson, ‘Religion and social capital revisited,’ in Loek Halman, Ole Riis eds., *Religion in a secularizing society: The Europeans' religion at the end of the 20th century*, Leiden/ Boston, 2003, 162-184.

4 Malina Voicu, Claudiu Tufis, ‘Religion and social participation in postcommunist Europe,’ in Joep de Hart, Paul Dekker, Loek Halman eds., *Religion and civil society in Europe*, Heidelberg/New York/London, 2013, 203-217; Katarzyna Lasinska, *Social capital in Eastern Europe: Poland an exception?*, Wiesbaden, 2013. Especially, Chapter 4 and 5.

and Hungary into consideration, it is worth introducing the idea of religious social capital in the debate of symbiosis of the border region. Churches in these two countries have similar social and institutional backgrounds. They share not only common adverse experiences in the socialist regime, but also direct institutional and intellectual background extending back to the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. The ‘traditional churches’ like Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed have been constitutionally guaranteed a favorable position in both countries, and have a stable position in the public sphere. According to some social research data, traditional churches seem to enjoy a wide range of social support in both countries.⁵ All these factors seem to make the churches the promising infrastructure for mutual understanding and collaboration. Although there are problems to be solved, e.g. the religious minorities in Slovakia, the churches could have the potential to help grass-roots social activity beyond the border.

We will begin by glancing over the concept of social capital and its relation with religion. Then we will look into the social research data regarding Slovakia, and point out some characteristics of the relationship between social capital and religion in Slovakia. For future research, we consider, at the end, the possible problems of Slovakian religious social capital for collaboration and symbiosis of the border region between Slovakia and Hungary.

Social Capital and Religion

Before looking at the data of social survey, we need to touch on the idea of social capital and its relation with religion. Researchers from different disciplines have defined this term in various ways, but here I follow the famous definition of Robert Putnam, that social capital is ‘connections among individuals– social networks, and the norms of reciprocity and

5 Tadaki Iio, ‘The religious factor in symbiosis in the Hungary-Slovakia border region’, in Osamu Ieda ed., *Transboundary symbiosis over the Danube: EU integration between Slovakia and Hungary from a local border perspective*, Sapporo, Japan, 33-47.

trustworthiness that arise from them'.⁶ He argued that with citizens organizing into associations and social networks on a voluntary basis, a form of trust among people is generated. This 'general trust' helps the creation of social integration, and, in the end, it also constitutes an important resource for successful civil society. OECD organized a conference on this topic in 2000 and defined it almost the same way. The conference report said that social capital is 'networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups'.⁷ In short, social capital is the invisible power of society, based on networks, mutual trust and norms of reciprocity.

The other important discussion from Putnam is that he classified social capital into two groups, i.e. 'bonding' and 'bridging'.⁸ Bonding social capital links people based on a sense of common identity such as family, close friends and people who share culture or ethnicity. It is said that bonding social capital strengthens the group's co-operation and solidarity. Bridging social capital, by contrast, links people or groups with different values. It could help the spread of information and reputation beyond the solid groups.

In regard to the relation between social capital and religion, there exist different observations.⁹ Under certain circumstances, church and religious associations could create the chance to nourish mutual trust inside and beyond churches, and therefore foster social capital. However, this would not always be the case, as Putnam himself gives a different view on this point when he researched the societies of Italy and the United States. Many case studies from various countries suggest that there are some other factors, i.e. creed of denominations, principle of church governance (horizontal or vertical), historical background etc. which have facilitating or impeding effects for functioning religious social capital.

6 Robert Putnam, *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, New York, 2000, 19.

7 *The well-being of nations: The role of human and social capital (Discussion Paper)*, OECD, 2001, 41.

8 Putnam, *op.cit.*, 22-23.

9 Halman, Pettersson, *op.cit.*, 163-171.

Religious Social Capital in Slovakia

Social Capital Indicators

To get the sketch of social capital in Slovakia from the result of the social survey, we will begin by examining the standard indicators of generalized trust (table 1), and memberships in voluntary organizations (table 2).¹⁰ It is widely recognized that these two indicators tend to show close correlation across counties,¹¹ but the result of Slovakia diverges from the general tendency.

Trust in generalized other is regarded as one of the main components of social capital. When the majority of the society members feel that the other members share basic values and moral standards, ‘generalized trust’ would stand at a high level. This feeling makes it easy to connect with unknown people and establish civil society, where

Table1:Generalised trust

	EVS 1999	EVS 2008
Denmark	66.5	76 (↗)
Sweden	66.3	70.7 (↗)
Finland	58.0	64.7 (↗)
Netherlands	59.8	61.7 (↗)
Great Britain	29.7	40.3 (↗)
Ireland	35.8	38.9 (↗)
Germany	34.7	38.8 (↗)
Austria	33.9	36.8 (↗)
Belgium	30.7	34.6 (↗)
Spain	36.2	34.3 (↘)
Estonia	22.8	32.6 (↗)
Luxembourg	24.8	31.1 (↗)
Italy	32.6	30.8 (↘)
The Czech Republic	23.9	30.1 (↗)
Lithuania	24.9	29.9 (↗)
Poland	18.9	27.6 (↗)
France	22.2	26.2 (↗)
Latvia	17.1	25.5 (↗)
Slovenia	21.7	24.2 (↗)
Malta	20.7	21.7 (↗)
Greece	23.7	21.3 (↘)
Hungary	21.8	21.2 (↘)
Croatia	18.4	19.7 (↗)
Bulgaria	26.9	17.9 (↘)
Romania	10.1	17.6 (↗)
Portugal	10.0	17.2 (↗)
<i>Slovakia</i>	15.7	12.6 (↘)
Cyprus	N/A	9.2

10 Researchers have used various indicators to measure social capital. ‘Generalized trust’ and ‘involvement in network’ are used by most of them, but other indicators such as ‘institutional trust’ and ‘reciprocity’ are also tried to be measured with difficulty. Ton van Schaik, ‘Social capital in the European Values Study Surveys,’ (Country paper prepared for the OECD-ONS international conference on social capital measurement, London, September 25-27, 2002).

11 Robert D.Putnam, ‘Bowling alone: America’s declining social capital’, *Journal of democracy*, 6-1, 1995, pp.65-78.

Table2:Membership in organization / activities

	EVS 1999	EVS 2008
Sweden	95.7	100 (↗)
Netherlands	92.4	96.3 (↗)
Denmark	84.4	92.9 (↗)
Malta	42.2	78.5 (↗)
Cyprus	N/A	75.7
Finland	80.1	73.2 (↘)
Belgium	65.2	66.1 (↗)
<i>Slovakia</i>	65.0	63.4 (↘)
Croatia	43.1	58.5 (↗)
The Czech Republic	60.2	50.5 (↘)
Slovenia	51.7	47.1 (↘)
Great Britain	33.6	46 (↗)
Ireland	57.1	42.6 (↘)
Germany	46.6	42.5 (↘)
Austria	66.8	41.5 (↘)
France	39.4	40.7 (↗)
Estonia	33.5	39.9 (↗)
Italy	42.0	38 (↘)
Luxembourg	58.2	36.1 (↘)
Latvia	31.4	28.2 (↘)
Lithuania	18.6	26.4 (↗)
Greece	56.4	25.3 (↘)
Spain	30.9	24.6 (↘)
Romania	21.1	23.6 (↗)
Poland	25.0	22.2 (↘)
Hungary	30.8	20.4 (↘)
Bulgaria	22.9	18.7 (↘)
Portugal	27.6	17.9 (↘)

European ‘Visegrad Group’ countries, but because the score has been worsening in the period of time, albeit a majority of countries shows improving tendencies.

The other basic indicator of social capital, i.e. the organizational membership shows an interesting tendency with regard to Slovakia. To the question, ‘which voluntary organization and activities, if any, do you belong to’, more than 60% of respondents from Slovakia

people could collaborate for solving collective matters.¹²

European Values Study (EVS) has a question straightforwardly to this point by asking, ‘generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?’ The result of the latest two research waves from 1999 and 2008 reveals clear regional differences between EU countries.

North European countries, namely Denmark, Sweden and Finland show much higher levels in both years than South European countries (Cyprus, Portugal, Greece) and post-communist Eastern and Central European countries (Former Yugoslavian states, Bulgaria, Romania). The result of Slovakia is outstanding not only because it shows by far the lowest score amongst Central

12 Eric M. Uslaner, *The moral foundations of trust*, Cambridge U.P., 2002, 1-3.

ticked at least one from the listed organizations.¹³ Although we find the North European countries in the leading position here again, Slovakia makes the second pack with Malta, Cyprus, and Croatia. Respondents from Slovakia not just belonged to the association, but actively engaged in its activity in 1999 (table 3). In this year, Slovakia scored the second highest result amongst EU member states behind Sweden, however, we found this score dropped in 2008 to third place from the bottom.

Social Capital and Religion

Two peculiar points of the result of social survey on Slovakia, i.e. the gap between the two major indicators of social capital, and the drastic fall of the organizational engagement between 9 years of time, would be explainable only when we cover macro level socioeconomic and political research as well as micro level research of organizations or associations specifying the field of activity. Here, I try to consider the religious dimension with regard to this gap in Slovakia using EVS data to have outlook for further research.

Slovakia is known as one of the most religious countries in EU member states, and this image can well be backed up by the data of social research. The EVS result (2008) shows, to the question ‘are you

Table3:Work unpaid for organization / activities

	EVS 1999	EVS 2008
Netherlands	49.2	85.4 (↗)
Italy	26.0	60.7 (↗)
Slovenia	28.5	57.8 (↗)
Sweden	56.1	n/a (-)
Croatia	23.6	53.9 (↗)
The Czech Republic	33.2	41.8 (↗)
Luxembourg	30.2	41.6 (↗)
Finland	38.0	39.4 (↗)
Denmark	37.2	n/a (-)
Belgium	35.4	34.2 (↘)
Ireland	32.6	32.3 (↘)
Austria	30.4	27.7 (↘)
France	27.1	24.8 (↘)
Latvia	22.4	23.9 (↗)
Germany	19.3	23.8 (↗)
Estonia	18.0	22.5 (↗)
Great Britain	42.3	22.1 (↘)
Cyprus	n/a	17 (-)
Lithuania	15.8	16.3 (↗)
Greece	39.8	15.6 (↘)
Malta	28.6	14.6 (↘)
Romania	15.7	13.2 (↘)
Bulgaria	18.8	13.1 (↘)
Spain	17.6	12.9 (↘)
Poland	13.9	12.9 (↘)
<i>Slovakia</i>	<i>51.4</i>	<i>12.3</i> (↘)
Portugal	16.4	12.2 (↘)
Hungary	15.4	11.9 (↘)

¹³ The listed organizations can be seen in the table 4 in this paper.

a religious person', 84% of respondents gave an affirmative answer, which is surpassed only by Cyprus, Poland, Greece and Italy. It is more important for us to focus on the data of their active attendance in the religious service. About 40% of respondents answered that they go to church at least once a week, and almost 50% attend a religious service once a month.¹⁴

High rate of church attendance in Slovakia partly explains the above mentioned high score of voluntary engagement. Looking into the details of membership of organizations and unpaid work for them, we can see that the Slovakian indicator is largely supported by their involvement in 'religious and church activity' (16.5% in 1999 to 8.5% in 2008) along with 'sports and recreation' (17.7% to 5.9%) and 'trade union' (16.2% to 4.8%) (Table 4). Correlation between the rate of church attendance and voluntary engagement is hardly observable in countries with high rates of voluntary engagement, like Scandinavian and Benelux countries.

Table4:Membership of organizations / activities

type of organizations	year		2008	
	membership	unpaid work	membership	unpaid work
Social welfare services for elderly, handicapped or deprived people	6.7	6.2	3.5	1.9
Religious or church organizations	16.5	12.9	8.6	4.3
Education, arts, music or cultural activities	7.0	5.6	3.5	1.7
Trade unions	16.2	5.9	4.8	1.4
Political parties or groups	6.9	5.1	1.4	0.8
Local community action on issues like poverty, employment, housing, racial equality	8.3	6.8	2.1	1.3
Third world development or human rights	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.1
Conservation, the environment, ecology, animal rights	2.6	2.0	2.2	0.9
Professional associations	4.9	3.0	2.1	1.0
Youth work	6.6	5.5	2.6	1.8
Sports or recreation	17.7	13.4	5.9	2.9
Women's groups	7.0	4.7	2.2	1.3
Peace movement	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.3
Voluntary organizations concerned with health	4.4	3.8	3.4	2.2
Other groups	7.9	6.2	5.0	2.7

14 Tadaki Iio, *op.cit.*, 38-40.

Taking this finding together with the low level of generalized trust in Slovakia, it is assumable that the religious organizations and their activities have not fostered the ‘generalized trust’, and therefore, social capital in general. Or conversely we can presume that religion in Slovakia could be a potential factor to upgrading social capital if it works effectively.

Utilizing Potential of Religion and Church

Why does it seem that religion in Slovakia were not functioning as a factor to foster generalized trust, although many authors in this field agree that religion is a major generator of social capital?¹⁵ For further research, I propose to look at the following possible explanations.

- *Religion and society are out of touch with one another.* When religion cloisters itself in chapels on the one hand and society doesn’t want churches to play a role in the secular sphere on the other, it makes sense that the religious indicator doesn’t affect much on social capital indicators. In such a case, personal belief and religious networks could generate trust and solidarity only inside spiritual communities, and this ‘bonding’ social capital would be frozen inside the congregation.¹⁶ Although Slovakia accepts constitutionally a principle of friendly state church separation and a few Christian parties have a stable seat in the parliament, it is pointed out that churches in Slovakia are not contributing so actively and systematically toward social problems.¹⁷

15 John A. Coleman, S.J., ‘Religious social capital: Its nature, social location, and limits,’ in Corwin E. Smidt ed., *Religion as social capital: Producing the common good*, Texas, 2003, 33-47.

16 Coleman, *op.cit.*, 37-38.

17 Pavol Bargár, ‘The missionary practice of the Czech and Slovak churches in the perspective of crisis situations typical for their context’, *Central European missiological forum*, 2011, 6-20.

- *Multi confessional system divides Slovakian society into sections.* In case there exist several denominations and confront with or sever from each other, people's religiosity could work negatively. Slovakia is a multi-confessional society with Catholic dominance. According to the census in 2011¹⁸, the majority of the population (62%) declared themselves belonging to Roman Catholic, the minority churches, i.e. Evangelical (5.9%), Greek Catholic (3.8%) and Reformed Christian (1.8%) keeps stable camps with their solid historical backgrounds and networks with the neighboring countries. When the social organization is built around each denomination pillar like it was or is said to be a case in Netherland, Canada and Malaysia (so-called 'pillarization'), generalized trust would hardly cross each pillar.
- *There exists outer elements which inhibits the integrative function of religion.* It is possible that external causes hinder in itself the integrative power of religion and stand in the way of fostering generalized trust. We can suppose that economic and regional disparity or cultural gaps between generations would be inhibitory factors. However, an even more important factor would be ethnic and linguistic diversity, because religious practices are closely connected with language in general. In each denomination, there are linguistic problems for ethnic minorities to attend Mass and hear sermons.¹⁹ This might cause a sense of estrangement.

Cross border collaboration between Slovakia and Hungary

18 http://slovak.statistics.sk/wps/wcm/connect/87ee3f0c-54fd-4647-b083-67c399e68bfb/Table_14_Population_by_religion_2011_2001_1991.pdf?MOD=AJPERES

19 József Menyhárt, 'Katolikus nyelvpolitika Szlovákiában', in Gizella Szabó Mihály and István Lanstyák, eds., *Magyarok Szlovákiában vol. 7 (Nyelv)*, Šamorín, 2011, 27-37.

has been increasingly required especially after EU accession. There exist many common problems, for which wider participation might be beneficial, e.g. development of the border region, environmental protection, care for poverty and elderly people, immigrants and so forth. Christian churches in these two countries, which share a common historical background and enjoyed relatively favorable acceptance in society, may have a potential to play a key role in tackling these problems. The possible inhibitory element we have presumed might be entangled at the local level, and it can hardly be raveled only by analyzing statistical data. We need to research the difficulty of churches in the local society, and consider the way to remove it, comparing with other regions where religious social capital works.