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Party of the Periphery in the City of the Country's Center: The Case of the Smer–Social Democracy in Bratislava during Slovakian Parliamentary Elections*

Partia peryferii w mieście-centrum. Przypadek słowackiej partii Smer–Socjalna Demokracja w wyborach parlamentarnych w Bratysławie

• Abstract •

The text is devoted to the electoral strongholds of the party Smer–Social Democracy in the Slovak capital. The analyzed party is atypical, as it is strongly anti-establishment and populist left-wing, rarely described in the literature. The research results indicated that a common feature of all Bratislava districts with an overrepresentation of left-wing support in the period in question is their peripheral, outlying location in relation to the capital's central districts and an above-standard share of 1970s housing.

Keywords: social democracy; Slovakia; Smer; Bratislava

• Abstrakt •

Tekst poświęcony jest twierdzeniom wyborczym partii Smer–Socjalna Demokracja w stolicy Słowacji. Analizowane ugrupowanie stanowi nietypową, gdyż mocno antyestablishmentową i populistyczną lewicę, rzadko opisywaną w literaturze przedmiotu. Wyniki badań wskazały, że cechą wspólną wszystkich dzielnic Bratysławy z nadreprezentacją poparcia dla lewicy w omawianym okresie jest ich peryferyjne, obrzeżne położenie względem centralnych dzielnic stolicy oraz ponadstandardowy udział budownictwa mieszkaniowego z lat 70. XX wieku.

Słowa kluczowe: socjaldemokracja; Słowacja; Smer; Bratysława

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1. Introduction

Social democratic parties grew out of the traditions of the labor movement, the basis of their electorate being residents of urban areas. In their classic form, socialist parties developed mainly in Western Europe. In some of these, national capitals were permanently the sites of higher-than-nationwide support for left-wing parties, such as Copenhagen, Vienna, and Brussels. Often used in research, the concept of cleavage (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967, pp. 14–15), indicating the historical origins of political divisions in Western societies and their persistence throughout the 20th century, became disputed after 1989 regarding its applicability to party systems in Central and Eastern European countries. One reason was the variability of electorate preferences in the emerging democratic party systems (Giugla, Johnston, & Constantinescu, 2011, p. 143).

Slovakia is a special case regarding the urban dominance of support for social democratic parties and the variability of preferences in countries undergoing democratic transition. In a relatively small country like Slovakia, Bratislava plays a unique role as the center of economic development. As a result, Slovak socio-political divisions are strongly linked to the center-periphery cleavage across the country (Plešivčák, 2014). Contemporary Slovak politics is significantly based on a west-east division and the dichotomy between Bratislava and the rest of the country. As Jennifer A. Yoder observes, “most Slovaks do not identify with Bratislava” (2013, p. 111).

The mainstream of the Slovak left in the 21st century is Smer–Social Democracy. “The Smer–SD, self-claimed as a ‘rustically social democracy’, which is generally not so attractive for young or first-time voters. The spatial support for Slovak SD is visible, especially within less urbanised areas in the east and north-eastern parts of the country, as well as in peripheral parts of other regions” (Zvada, 2023, p. 210). In the capital, the Social Democrats have consistently scored lower than the averages for Slovakia. As Ľubomír Zvada concludes: “Slovak social democrats can also never be truly established in the capital, Bratislava” (2023, p. 201).

The geography of electoral support for Smer has not been the subject of separate studies, although it has found its place in broader publications devoted to Slovak social democracy or the political system of this Republic. The most relevant findings are those by Martin Plešivčák. The first aim of the paper will be to identify Smer’s electoral strongholds within Bratislava, conceptualized as areas of sustained support for the party beyond the average for the city in those elections. A scientific operationalization and theorization of the problem do not accompany the popularity of an electoral stronghold or bastion. A multiplicity of definitions of electoral

strongholds and derived concepts is to be noted. In general, the demarcation of electoral strongholds involves measuring the deviation of the electoral results of individual parties in a given area from those of previous elections and looking for seats with permanently higher support (*Wiesbadener Stadtanalysen. Parteihochburgen in Wiesbaden*, 2016, p. 3). The most serious definitions underlying scientific quantitative research are based on the result size (de Nantois, 2010, p. 183). Surveys and statistical purposes have attempted to present different support variants in percentage terms for the major parties, generally indicating some value between 50% and 60% at the district level. "However, there is no typically valid measure of the number of votes required for this" (Hilbig & Steingrube, 1999, p. 52). For our article, it has been considered that "strongholds of a party are, most simply, areas in which a party obtains an exceptionally high share of the vote over an extended period" (*Wiesbadener Stadtanalysen...*, 2016, p. 3). Referring to the popular nationalization approach, which obliges one to compare the regional performance of a party with the national result, it was decided to relate the results from the level of Bratislava's settlements to Smer's result at the city scale in the given election.

The study's second aim was a qualitative analysis of neighborhoods with an electoral overrepresentation of Smer. The area of above-average support for Robert Fico's party in the capital was examined in terms of two factors:

- a) the peripheral character, related to the separation from the parts of the city considered central and the late, post-war inclusion of these areas in the capital;
- b) the type of housing, comparing the percentage of buildings in a given neighborhood built before 1939 and after 1945 with the average for the city.

Existing data from the period in question were used for this purpose¹. In the study of electoral geography, the problem of static cartography became apparent (Woolstencroft, 1980, p. 540). Therefore, for each party, all parliamentary election campaigns since the foundation of the Smer party were taken into account to show the persistence of voting behavior in a given area. The analysis of more than one electoral campaign entails identifying the stability of strongholds over time (de Nantois, 2010, pp. 183–184, 193).

A study on the correlation of spatial distances and electoral behavior in Central and Eastern European cities has its specificity, resulting from the history of these countries and the aspirations of the communist regimes to build social egalitarianism: "On the one hand, there is the historical fact that communist regimes did their best to eliminate or suppress religious and class differences, leading to an expectation of

¹ All data on election results are based on collections of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, <https://volby.statistics.sk/>.

rather minor effects of these influences in post-communist societies” (van der Brug, Franklin, & Tóka, 2008, p. 591). It also meant blurring developmental inequalities in the spatial aspect. Unification tendencies were usually addressed in urban areas. As a Romanian researcher wrote about Bucharest: “These places were remnants of the old bourgeois state and were to be destroyed, both socially and spatially. Uniformization was a state policy not only for collective housings but also for former bourgeois neighborhoods” (Gutoiu, 2018, p. 50). In urban management, the experience of this part of Europe has been in the amalgam model, meaning the strength of centralized urban actors (*Major Cities and Their Peripheries: Co-operation and Co-ordinated Management*, 1994, p. 7). Officials claimed to have wanted to eliminate former areas of poverty in the name of eliminating class divisions in the city space by mixing up the population. The authorities aimed to achieve this via the unification of infrastructure and universal accessibility of public services, including education. To achieve this, the authorities pursued the model of a self-sufficient housing estate, inspired by the tradition of sociologist and urban planner Clarence Perry. The spatial differences within the cities of the region after several decades of egalitarian policies were therefore not as visible as in countries with a continuous period of free-market capitalism.

Given such historical experience, the key factor of electoral overrepresentation in Bratislava was its persistence rather than size. It should also be added that Smer’s identity evolved, as did its position in the political system. Smer was able to form coalitions both with populist right-wing parties and with the left-wing Hlas. Support for Smer ranged from 13.5% to 44.4% nationally during the analyzed period. This research shows the overrepresentation of support for social democratic parties in Slovakia’s capital city can be observed in peripheral districts. The electoral strongholds were four peripheral districts of the Slovak capital – Rača, Petržalka, Vrakuňa, and Dúbravka. In all campaigns that took place over a period of more than twenty years, the support for Smer in those districts was higher than the average for the city.

The center-periphery cleavage in some states of Central and Eastern Europe plays a significant role. In the social sciences, multi-level understanding of peripheralization is marked. Rokkan has paid attention to the horizontal and vertical understanding of peripherality: „the peripherality will be expressed concretely in the daily life of the inhabitants of the area, and in the nature of their links with groups in the centre”, the relationship with the center, with the core, will concern political decision-making by the center, further cultural standardization and economic dependence (Flora, Kuhnle, & Urwin, 1999, pp. 114–115). The notion of peripheries has therefore always been accompanied by a context of dependence and inferiority

to the centre. The term is most often used for global phenomena, or at least the scale of the whole country, but also the city. Traditionally, the urban periphery was associated with the effect of industrialization and the accompanying urbanization; it meant areas located around the historical city center, less developed and inhabited by poor people. It was followed by the metropolis phase in the Western world according to Michel Bassand's approach, which meant deindustrialization, expansion of the service sector, chaotic spatial development, gentrification, migration of the rich to the suburbia (Jałowiecki, 2010). Outside the Western world, traditional relationships lasted longer. Bratislava, the capital city in question, was in a specific, transitional period associated with globalization and Westernization, while still being influenced by the specific post-war period. The results of the elections in this city therefore show the possible direction of the evolution of social democratic parties in correlation with the changes in the electoral scene. The districts that showed above-average support for the leftist party were peripheral in the sense of "anti-city" or "non-city", both spatially and functionally. In the cultural dimension, capitalism meant restoring the social and symbolic hegemony of the spatial center and middle class.

One difference between districts with an overrepresentation of social democratic voters and the rest of the city is the significant growth in housing from the 1945–1989 period, particularly from the 1970s and 1980s. Housing will be analyzed from the perspective of the period in which the buildings were constructed. This correlates with the continuity of voting behavior in the spatial dimension. In all four districts, the percentage of development exceeded the average for Bratislava as a whole, with the most significant percentage of buildings being multi-family dwellings.

According to one of the classic definitions, electoral geography studies „The concept of geographical context can be used to draw attention to the spatial situatedness of human action in contrast to the non-spatial sorting of people out into categories based on census and other classification schemes that inspires most conventional social science” (Agnew, 1996, p. 131). Various statistical methods and indicators have been used for this purpose. The present research is specific in nature, focusing on a very homogeneous urban space. Furthermore, the study covered a long-time horizon of more than twenty years and seven parliamentary elections. The third specific element is the level of support for Smer, which has always been a minority party in Bratislava.

The indicators most commonly used in research in electoral geography would be challenging to apply. In creating an indicator that would help identify electoral strongholds for the purposes of this paper, the authors drew on some aspects of the index of dissimilarity.

This indicator, which has been used in relevant studies, primarily surfaces in sociological and social geography research (Šimon, 2015). The index of dissimilarity serves to compare different groups in terms of their segregation (an uneven distribution of a given group with regards to a given feature). This paper compares the spatial distribution of support for Smer party city-wide and in particular districts in order to identify areas of overrepresentation.

The authors created the IEO (Index of Electoral Overrepresentation), which considers overrepresentation as the achievement of a higher percentage result by a party in the studied area than the result achieved on a city-wide basis. The IEO used in this article is represented by the formula: $IEO = 0.5 \sum_{i=1}^n |X_i - Y|$ where X is the percentage of votes cast for a party in the constituency in the campaign, and Y is the percentage of votes cast for the same party in the entire city in the campaign. The index used to analyze the electoral space of a city means that if a given party is supported by 15% of voters city-wide and 15% of voters in a given district, the index amounts to 0. If the party received all the votes validly cast in each district and no votes in the remaining districts, the index would reach its peak.

The IEO was calculated for four districts where, in all the campaigns, $X > Y$. This demonstrates the correlation of the continuity of support with overrepresentation. The scale of overrepresentation in electoral strongholds was presented as a percentage rather than percentage points. A final average of overrepresentation was drawn and compared for each of the districts. Also, the principle of not considering size was applied – what mattered was the proportion to the total and not absolute figures of metrics such as the number of voters or turnout. Additionally, the principle of not considering composition was applied – what mattered was the spatial distribution of voters and not their share in the total number of those entitled to vote.

2. Smer in Bratislava parliamentary elections 2002–2023

The genesis of Smer was linked to the crisis of the post-communist Democratic Left Party. Smer, founded in 1999, sought primarily to occupy the left-wing social space more than to adopt social democratic ideas (Marušiak, 2005, p. 168). The new party sought voters who did not find themselves in the populism-liberalism dichotomy and referred to the notion of the Third Way (Rybář & Deegan-Krause, 2008). After the defeat of traditional social democracy in 2002, Smer reinforced the socio-economic message: “[...] there is a strong hegemony of neoliberal and neoconservative ideas in Slovak society” (Blaha, 2011, p. 153). Fico’s party presented itself as an advocate of redistributive social policies and gradually took over part of

the patriotic agenda from the populists (Rybář & Deegan-Krause, 2008, pp. 506, 514). The new party absorbed the structures of the Democratic Left Party and several other center and left parties in 2004. Since then, it has openly referred to a social democratic identity (Marušiak, 2005, pp. 169–172). It also became part of the Party of European Socialists, although Smer, in some aspects, still maintains distance from the mainstream of Western social democracy (Blaha, 2011).

Out of several dimensions of social democratic identity, Smer fully adopted one (Marušiak, 2005, pp. 173–174). From the very beginning, Smer–Social Democracy constructed its identity around social justice, defense of vulnerable groups, etc., rather than around liberal values. It expressed no interest in defending the rights of various minorities; it focused its attention on material values. In the party's electorate, pensioners and wage earners became overrepresented over time, while those with higher education were underrepresented (Malová, 2013, pp. 562–567). It is worth mentioning that in 2014 Smer supported, together with conservative politicians, a constitutional amendment that defines marriage as a “unique union between a man and a woman” (Guasti, 2021, p. 201). As Luke March put it, Smer took an “anti-establishment social democracy” stance (2011, p. 144). At the same time, the eclectic and pragmatic Smer led Slovakia to adopt the euro in 2009. And as Juraj Hocman conclude: “Despite his personal views with regards to the NATO invasion of Iraq, Fico kept Slovak soldiers in a country plagued by civil war and suicide attacks and later on sent Slovak troops to Afghanistan” (2017, p. 115).

Bratislava's history was marked by rapid change. Pressburg was a city dominated by a Hungarian- and German-speaking population during the Habsburg monarchy. In the interwar and post-war period, as part of Czechoslovakia, it underwent a process of rapid “Slovakisation” through an influx of ethnic Slovaks (*Bratislava – hlavné mesto Slovenskej republiky – História*, n.d.). Another wave of significant change came in post-war, communist Czechoslovakia when industrialization processes advanced (Yoder, 2013, pp. 111, 129). Slovakia's main city became the center primarily of the chemical industry and oil refinery. Bratislava became the second-largest city of the entire Republic due to the changes of the 1970s (Leff, 1988, p. 251). From 154,000 in 1946, Bratislava expanded to more than 300,000 in the early 1970s, to reach more than half a million by the end of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (the population is now more than 480,000) (*Návrh. Komunitného plánu sociálnych služieb mestskej časti Bratislava – Dúbravka na roky 2016–2020*, 2015).

The Slovak capital comprises five counties (*Okres*) and 17 districts (*Miestna časť*). Mostly, the districts have no historical genealogy; not coincidentally, they are numbered. The 17 districts have been in place since 1990 (Divinsky, 1999, p. 47). Their traditions are often decades old (and even longer in the case of the city center),

and they are sometimes formerly independent towns incorporated into Bratislava. The center of Bratislava is district No. I, which is identical to the Old Town district; the most affluent parts also include the settlements of Kramáry and Koliba in the western part of district No. III. Considering the electoral support during the period in question and the factors indicated, it is possible to divide Bratislava's districts into four groups regarding support for Smer.

The first are the electoral strongholds where, in all parliamentary elections, Robert Fico's party achieved results above the municipal average. These are Rača, Dúbravka, Vrakuňa, and Petržalka.

Table 1. Smer Electoral Overrepresentation in Rača District

Election year	2002	2006	2010	2012	2016	2020	2023
Smer's result in Bratislava	12.3%	20.36%	23.81%	30.69%	18.22%	17.31%	17.49%
Smer's result in Rača	14.19%	23.74%	29.38%	36.4%	22.24%	19.17%	19.2%
IEO	15.36%	16.6%	23.39%	15.68%	22.06%	10.74%	9.77%

The average overrepresentation for this district is 16.22%.

Table 2. Smer Electoral Overrepresentation in Vrakuňa District

Election year	2002	2006	2010	2012	2016	2020	2023
Smer's result in Bratislava	12.3%	20.36%	23.81%	30.69%	18.22%	17.31%	17.49%
Smer's result in Vrakuňa	14.6%	22.32%	24.47%	33.15%	18.33%	21.04%	20.54%
IEO	18.69%	9.62%	2.77%	8.01%	6.03%	21.54%	17.43%

The average overrepresentation for this district is 12.01%.

Table 3. Smer Electoral Overrepresentation in Dúbravka District

Election year	2002	2006	2010	2012	2016	2020	2023
Smer's result in Bratislava	12.3%	20.36%	23.81%	30.69%	18.22%	17.31%	17.49%
Smer's result in Dúbravka	13.4%	22.67%	27.61%	34.94%	21.1%	19.36%	18.65%
IEO	8.94%	11.34%	12.38%	13.84%	15.8%	11.94%	6.63%

The average overrepresentation for this district is 11.55%.

Table 4. Smer Electoral Overrepresentation in Petržalka District

Election year	2002	2006	2010	2012	2016	2020	2023
Smer's result in Bratislava	12.3%	20.36%	23.81%	30.69%	18.22%	17.31%	17.49%
Smer's result in Petržalka	13.84%	22.49%	24.09%	32.02%	18.68%	19.25%	19.22%
IEO	12.52%	10.46%	1.75%	4.33%	2.52%	11.2%	9.89%

The average overrepresentation for this district is 7.52%.

The second group is made up of settlements wherein more than half of the elections (in all cases, it was five elections) Smer obtained results above the average; this was the case in Vajnory, Lamač, and Poddunajská Bystrica. The third group, on the other hand, was places where, in less than half of the elections, the Social Democrats happened to be above the average for the city; this was in Ružinov, Devín, Devínská Nova Ves, Záhorská Bystrica, and Nové Mesto. It was always below the Smer's average in Karlová Ves, Čunov, Rusovce, Jarovce, and the Old Town.

3. Electoral bastions of smer in Bratislava

3.1. Rača

The main stronghold of Smer continually remains Rača. The consistent overrepresentation is the highest. It is a district located unequivocally on the city's outskirts, 8 kilometers from the capital's center. The peripherality of Rača, which was incorporated into the capital in 1946, is expressed in its spatial distance not only from the strict city center in the form of the first district but also from Nové Mesto, which is wealthier and historically linked to the Slovak capital. Rača belongs to the less affluent districts of Bratislava, diverging in this respect both from Nové Mesto, from the center, and settlements located west of the Old Town. It is included in the perceived working-class part of the city's east (Ondoš & Korec, 2006, p. 62).

Rača became the site of intensive block housing, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. It is home to some of the most significant apartment blocks in the city – Krasňany. The district's development is dominated by buildings constructed in the period after WWII. In the number of buildings dating from 1946 to 1970, Rača is one of the leaders on the city scale. The second place in its structure is occupied by buildings from the 1970s. The percentage of the oldest buildings from before the end of the 19th century is close to the average for Bratislava. The dominance of

buildings from the post-war period contrasts with the neighboring district of Nové Mesto, where a significant percentage consists of buildings from 1920–1945 (*Socio-ekonomická analýza hlavného mesta Slovenskej republiky*, n.d.). In the context of Smer's weakness in Bratislava, it should be remembered that the district's share of the city's population in 2010 was 4.8%.

3.2. Dúbravka

Dúbravka is considered one of the most beautifully situated districts of the capital, surrounded by nature reserves and having had a rural character for most of its history. It is located northwest of the town center, at a distance of 8 km.

Despite its rural roots and well-known monuments in the center of the district, it is dominated entirely by large-panel buildings from the 1970s, contrasting with the idyllic landscape of the area. Almost 90% of the buildings date from that decade, a record for the whole capital (in the next Lamač this figure is around 74%, and in most neighborhoods it is below 50%). In all other categories of building age, Dúbravka ranked well below average. Dúbravka is the fifth most populous district, with approximately 40,000 inhabitants. According to 2010 data, the population of this district was around 8% of the city's population (*Socio-ekonomická analýza...*, n.d.)².

3.3. Vrakuňa

Vrakuňa is a small district of the eastern part of Bratislava, situated on its outskirts, 9 km from the center. It is, therefore, an unambiguously peripheral location. One of the confirmations of peripherality, not only in the spatial dimension, is the problem of transport connections to the center of the capital (*Bratislavská Vrakuňa bude mať dočasnú vlakovú zastávku*, 2016). It is bordered on the south by Podunajské Biskupice district and on the other direction by Ružinov, which separates Vrakuňa from the city center. Together with these two districts, it forms the Bratislava II district. Vrakuňa is one of the youngest districts of the capital, having been incorporated into Bratislava only in 1972.

² Gustáv Husák, who comes from this district (and is buried there), was the leader of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia from 1969 to 1987 (Jancura, 2013).

As an independent settlement, it had a village character. Significant expansion came in the inter-war years. Still, it only took on an urban character after the formalization of its affiliation with the capital, where, in principle, an entirely new architectural space was created. Vrakuňa today is the site of a definite predominance of buildings from the 1970s, which account for about half of all residential buildings. More than a third were built in the 1980s, which is also well above the average for the city. At the same time, it is significant that the number of buildings from the 1990s also exceeds the city average by a small margin (*Socio-ekonomická analýza...*, n.d.). The district is undergoing rapid expansion, with political disputes over the role of investments by private building developers. It is home to some of the cheapest real estate in the capital. An area whose negative reputation extends beyond the district is the so-called Pentagon (40 and 42 Stavbárska Street), a large building built on a pentagonal plan in 1970, which initially served as a place to house construction workers and was transformed into a building with social housing. Today, it is widely regarded as a breeding ground for crime and various social pathologies (*História domu Stavbárska 40, 42 – Pentagon*, n.d.).

3.4. Petržalka

The overrepresentation of Smer's electoral support in Petržalka met the criteria, although it remained significantly lower in percentage than the other three districts. Petržalka is the largest district of the capital, with more than 110,000 citizens. Its location is peripheral (5 km from the Old Town) in that the Danube is critical as a natural barrier between Petržalka and the rest of Bratislava. It has been formally divided into three parts (Dvory, Lúky, Háje). Its peripherality for decades of the 20th century was linked to its de facto border character (*PHSR mestskej časti Bratislava-Petržalka 2016–2023*, n.d., p. 6), functioning on the border of three states.

In the 19th century, Petržalka was dominated by the German community; it was then called Engerau. In 1890, the first permanent bridge was built, connecting it to the other bank of the Danube. From the beginning of the 20th century, intensive industrial development began in the previously rural area, with a rapid influx of people and a gradual change in the ethnic structure. After liberation by the Red Army, it was incorporated into Bratislava in 1946.

Petržalka became the site of significant housing developments. From 1966, plans for a 100,000-strong district were drawn up (*PHSR...*, n.d.). In 1973, the demolition of the old buildings started, involving around 90% of the buildings. Between 1973 and 1985, a massive housing development was carried out, including

large-panel construction from 1977 (*Pred 40 rokmi začali stavať bratislavské sídlisko Petržalku*, 2013). The peculiarity of Petržalka as a string of apartment blocks meant it did not have a precisely defined spatial center. Today, the development of the district consists of almost 100% post-war buildings, including those built in the 1980s (nearly 35%) and more than anything in the 1980s (almost 63%). Petržalka's electoral significance is enormous, as it covers $\frac{1}{4}$ of the population of the entire capital. Within a district more significant than most Slovak cities, the influence of the left is not entirely symmetrical, affecting the northern parts – the Ovsíšte estate, built between 1975 and 1982, and parts of the large blocks of flats – Dvory – marked V and VI, close to the Matador factory area.

The Smer electoral districts, apart from those already indicated, show no simple correlations. One can speak of a certain similarity between Rača, Vrakuňa, and Petržalka in terms of the educational structure of the inhabitants at the beginning of the 21st century. In all three, people with higher education were underrepresented, distinguishing them from Dúbravka, which had a slight surplus of citizens with higher education (*Socio-ekonomická analýza...*, n.d.).

The problem of depopulation, which has affected modern Slovakia, has not affected the four districts in question to the same extent. Petržalka and Dúbravka were subject to strong depopulation, Rača was not, but maintained its population level, and Vrakuňa recorded an increase (*Socio-ekonomická analýza...*, n.d.).

Also, the employment structure of neighborhood residents did not form a coherent whole. Vrakuňa and Rača were characterized by an above-standard percentage of employees in the second sector (industry), Dúbravka in the third sector, while Petržalka showed average values for the whole city (*Socio-ekonomická analýza...*, n.d.).

The ethnic divisions in society, which are significant in the Slovak realities, especially in the context of a significant Hungarian minority, do not form a simple pattern in the districts under discussion, not least because the Hungarian minority is not very numerous in the capital. At the same time, a higher proportion of Hungarians are found in the east of the city (Plešivčák, 2013, p. 270).

The three neighborhoods where support for Smer in most elections exceeded the average for the city were similar in key aspects to the main four. Podunajské Biskupice, which has belonged to the capital since 1972, contains large blocks of flats from the 1970s (distinguished by a slightly higher percentage of the Hungarian population) (*História Podunajských Biskupíc*, n.d.), the very small Lamač is also characterized by a high rate of 1970s–1989 apartment blocks, while Vajnory, which only became a district in 1990, is also characterized by a higher percentage of 1970s buildings than the municipal average. At the same time, similar to Rača, there are numerous pre-war buildings (*Socio-ekonomická analýza...*, n.d.).

4. Summary

A common feature of all Bratislava districts with an overrepresentation of support for the left in the period under review is their peripheral, outlying location of the capital's central districts. Apart from one case (Vrakuňa), all other districts were incorporated into the capital in 1946. The peripherality aspect remains symmetrical for the spatial structure of support for Smer nationally, the party being overrepresented in less developed regions far from Bratislava.

The fundamental convergence in the areas of high support in the capital is the dominance of 1970s construction (only in the case of Rača a significant proportion of buildings from this era is accompanied by a considerable proportion from the first post-war quarter-century). The Slovak left in urban space thus remains a left sentiment for the social advancement and social security of the last two decades of the communist system. The apartment blocks and the migrations associated with their creation fostered a leftist orientation, if only through breaking previous social ties. The phenomenon of rapid change was particularly evident in Petržalka: "The construction of housing estates, the demolition of original buildings, the incomplete quality of public space, and the 10-fold increase in population led to a violation of the local identity of the inhabitants" (*PHSR...*, n.d., p. 8).

At the same time, Robert Fico's party remained underrepresented in the city center and the semi-rural settlements incorporated into the capital. Neighborhoods of an entirely different character surround Petržalka's blocks of flats. The districts of Čunovo, Jarovce, and Rusovce in the south are areas with a significant underrepresentation of votes for the left. They are rural areas with a large area and a small population. With a population ranging from around 1,000 to just over 3,000, they were historically centers of Croatian population, with a high percentage of Germans as well (*História. Čunovo*, n.d.; *História Rusoviec je viditeľná dodnes*, n.d.; *Jarovce – História*, n.d.).

The symmetry of underrepresentation in the modernizing center and in the conservative rural areas reflects the complex identity of this formation, operating in the space between Europeanism, Occidentalism, modernization and anti-modernization, populist mobilization, and caution towards the Western world. As Juraj Marušiak observes: "Smer is halfway between previous 'pragmatic', but rather populist identity and expected social democratic identity" (2005, p. 175).

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